THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy & Science Fiction

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

AUGUST 1952

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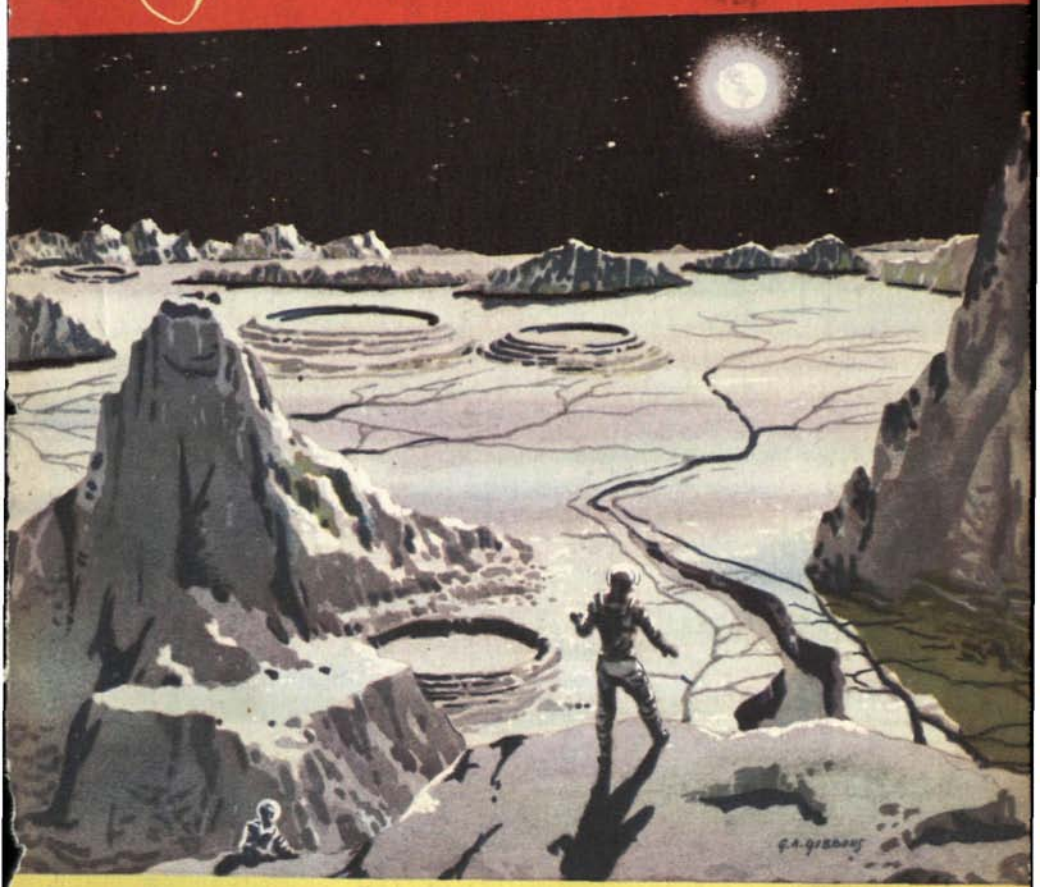

Hobson's Choice — ALFRED BESTER

The Ancestral Amethyst — L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP & FLETCHER PRATT

Proof Positive — GRAHAM GREENE

The Hour of Letdown — E. B. WHITE

also ANTHONY BOUCHER, L. P. HARTLEY, ALAN NELSON, *and others*

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 3, No. 4 AUGUST

Hobson's Choice	*by* ALFRED BESTER	3
The Ancestral Amethyst	*by* L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP & FLETCHER PRATT	16
W.S.	*by* L. P. HARTLEY	23
The Tooth	*by* G. GORDON DEWEY	32
Nine-Finger Jack	*by* ANTHONY BOUCHER	47
The Sling	*by* RICHARD ASHBY	52
The Soothsayer	*by* KEM BENNETT	63
Who Shall I Say is Calling?	*by* AUGUST DERLETH	70
Listen	*by* GORDON R. DICKSON	79
Nor Iron Bars	*by* DAN KELLY & CLEVE CARTMILL	85
Extra-Curricular	*by* GAREN DRUSSAÏ	90
Stair Trick	*by* MILDRED CLINGERMAN	97
Recommended Reading		102
Proof Positive	*by* GRAHAM GREENE	105
The Gualcophone	*by* ALAN NELSON	109
The Hour of Letdown	*by* E. B. WHITE	124

Cover by George Gibbons (lunar landscape)

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 3, No. 4, August, 1952. Published bimonthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, $2.00 in U. S. and possessions; $2.50 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. *Copyright, 1952, by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved.* *Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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Here's the table of contents:

Robert HEINLEIN—Blowups Happen
Jack WILLIAMSON—Hindsight
A. E. VAN VOGT—Vault of the Beast
L. Sprague DE CAMP—The Exalted
Isaac ASIMOV—Nightfall
Lewis PADGETT—When the Bough Breaks
Lawrence O'DONNELL—Clash by Night
John PIERCE—Invariant
Murray LEINSTER—First Contact
Dolton EDWARDS—Meihem in ce Klasrum
Eric Frank RUSSELL—Hobbyist
T. L. SHERRED—E for Effort
William TENN—Child's Play
Theo. STURGEON—Thunder and Roses
Eric Frank RUSSELL—Late Night Final
Kris NEVILLE—Cold War
Clifford D. SIMAK—Eternity Lost
J. H. SCHMITZ—The Witches of Karres
Lester DEL RAY—Over the Top
William T. POWERS—Meteor
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Hobson's Choice

by ALFRED BESTER

THIS is a warning to accomplices like you, me, and Addyer.

Can you spare price of one cup coffee, honorable sir? I am indigent organism which are hungering.

By day, Addyer was a statistician. He concerned himself with such matters as Statistical Tables, Averages & Dispersions, Groups That Are Not Homogenous, and Random Sampling. At night, Addyer plunged into an elaborate escape phantasy divided into two parts. Either he imagined himself moved back in time 100 years with a double armful of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, bestsellers, hit-plays and gambling records; or else he imagined himself transported forward in time 1000 years to the Golden Age of perfection.

There were other phantasies which Addyer entertained on odd Thursdays, such as (by a fluke) becoming the only man left on earth with a world of passionate beauties to fecundate; such as acquiring the power of invisibility which would enable him to rob banks and right wrongs with impunity; such as possessing the mysterious power of working miracles.

Up to this point you and I and Addyer are identical. Where we part company is in the fact that Addyer was a statistician.

Can you spare cost of one cup coffee, honorable miss? For blessed charitability? I am beholden.

On Monday, Addyer rushed into his chief's office, waving a sheaf of papers. "Look here, Mr. Grande," Addyer sputtered. "I've found something fishy. Extremely fishy . . . In the statistical sense, that is."

"Oh hell," Grande answered. "You're not supposed to be finding anything. We're in between statistics until the war's over."

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"I was leafing through the Interior Department's reports. D'you know our population's up?"

"Not after the Atom Bomb it isn't," said Grande. "We've lost double what our birthrate can replace." He pointed out the window to the twenty-five foot stub of the Washington Monument. "There's your documentation."

"But our population's up 3.0915 percent." Addyer displayed his figures. "What about that, Mr. Grande?"

"Must be a mistake somewhere," Grande muttered after a moment's inspection. "You'd better check."

"Yes, sir," said Addyer, scurrying out of the office. "I knew you'd be interested, sir. You're the ideal statistician, sir." He was gone.

"Poop," said Grande and once again began the mental estimation of the quantity of bored respirations left to him. It was his personalized anesthesia.

On Tuesday, Addyer discovered that there was no correlation between the mortality-birthrate ratio and the population increase. The war was doubling mortality and halving births; yet the population was minutely increasing. Addyer displayed his discovery to Grande, received a pat on the back, and went home to a new phantasy in which he woke up 1,000,000 years in the future, learned the answer to the enigma, and decided to remain amidst snow-capped mountains and snow-capped bosoms, safe under the aegis of a culture saner than aureomycin.

On Wednesday, Addyer requisitioned the Comptometer and File and ran a test check on Washington, D. C. To his dismay he learned that the population of the former capital was down 0.0029 percent. This was distressing and Addyer went home to dream about carrying his library back to Victoria's Golden Age where he amazed and confounded the world with his brilliant output of novels, plays and poetry, all cribbed from Shaw, Galsworthy and Wilde.

Can you spare price of one coffee, honorable sir? I am distressed individual needful of chariting.

On Thursday, Addyer tried another check, this time on the city of Philadelphia. He discovered that Philadelphia's population was up 0.0959 percent. Very encouraging. He tried a run-down on Little Rock. Population up 1.1329 percent. He tested St. Louis. Population up 2.0924 percent . . . and this despite the complete extinction of Jefferson County owing to one of those military mistakes of an excessive nature.

"My God!" Addyer exclaimed, trembling with excitement. "The closer I get to the center of the country, the greater the increase. But it was the

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center of the country that took the heaviest punishment in the Buz-Raid. What's the answer?"

That night he shuttled back and forth between the future and the past in his ferment, and he was down at the shop by 7 A.M. He put a twenty-four hour claim on the Compo and Files. He followed up his hunch and he came up with a fantastic discovery which he graphed in approved form. On the map of the remains of the United States he drew concentric circles in colors illustrating the areas of population increase. The red, orange, yellow, green and blue circles formed a perfect target around Finney County, Kansas.

"Mr. Grande," Addyer shouted in a high statistical passion, "Finney County has got to explain this."

"You go out there and get that explanation," Grande replied, and Addyer departed.

"Poop," muttered Grande and began integrating his pulse-rate with his eye-blink.

Can you spare price of one coffee, dearly madam? I am starveling organism requiring nutritiousment.

Now travel in those days was hazardous. Addyer took ship to Charleston (there were no rail connections remaining in the North Atlantic states) and was wrecked off Hattaras by a rogue mine. He drifted in the icy waters for seventeen hours, muttering through his teeth: "Oh Christ! If only I'd been born 100 years ago."

Apparently this form of prayer was potent. He was picked up by a Navy Sweeper and shipped to Charleston where he arrived just in time to acquire a sub-critical radiation burn from a raid which fortunately left the railroad unharmed. He was treated for the burn from Charleston to Macon (change) from Birmingham to Memphis (bubonic plague) to Little Rock (polluted water) to Tulsa (radiation masks) to Kansas City (The O.K. Bus Co. Accepts No Liability For Lives Lost Through Acts Of War) to Lyonesse, Finney County, Kansas.

And there he was in Finney County with its great magma pits and scars and radiation streaks; whole farms blackened and razed; whole highways so blasted they looked like dotted lines; whole population 4-F. Clouds of soot and radiation derivatives hung over Finney County by day, turning it into a Pittsburgh on a still afternoon. Auras of radiation glowed at night, highlighted by the blinking red warning beacons, turning the county into one of those over-exposed night photographs, all blurred and cross-hatched by deadly slashes of light.

After a restless night in Lyonesse Hotel, Addyer went over to the County

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Seat for a check on their birth records. He was armed with the proper credentials, but the County Seat was not armed with the statistics. That excessive military mistake again. It had extinguished the Seat.

A little annoyed, Addyer marched off to the County Medical Association office. His idea was to poll the local doctors on births. There was an office and one attendant who had been a practical nurse. He informed Addyer that Finney County had lost its last doctor to the army eight months previous. Mid-wives might be the answer to the birth enigma but there was no record of mid-wives. Addyer would simply have to canvass from door to door, asking if any lady within practiced that ancient profession.

Further piqued, Addyer returned to the Lyonesse Hotel and wrote on a slip of tissue paper: HAVING DATA DIFFICULTIES. WILL REPORT AS SOON AS INFORMATION AVAILABLE. He slipped the message into an aluminum capsule, attached it to his sole surviving carrier pigeon, and dispatched it to Washington with a prayer. Then he sat down at his window and brooded.

He was aroused by a curious sight. In the street below, the O.K. Bus Co. had just arrived from Kansas City. The old coach wheezed to a stop, opened its door with some difficulty, and permitted a one-legged farmer to emerge. His burned face was freshly bandaged. Evidently a well-to-do burgess who could afford to travel for medical treatment. The bus backed up for the return trip to Kansas City and honked a warning horn. That was when the curious sight began.

From nowhere . . . absolutely nowhere . . . a horde of people appeared. They skipped from back alleys, from behind rubble piles; they popped out of stores, they filled the street. They were all jolly, healthy, brisk, happy. They laughed and chatted as they climbed into the bus. They looked like hikers and tourists, carrying knapsacks, carpet-bags, box-lunches and even babies. In two minutes the bus was filled. It lurched off down the road, and as it disappeared Addyer heard happy singing break out and echo from the walls of rubble.

"I'll be damned," he said.

He hadn't heard spontaneous singing in over two years. He hadn't seen a carefree smile in over three years. He felt like a color-blind man who was seeing the full spectrum for the first time. It was uncanny. It was also a little blasphemous.

"Don't those people know there's a war on?" he asked himself.

And a little later: "They looked too healthy. Why aren't they in uniform?"

And last of all: "Who *were* they anyway?"

That night Addyer's phantasy was confused.

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Can you spare price of one cup coffee, kindly sir? I am estrangered and faintly from hungering.

The next morning Addyer arose early, hired a car at an exorbitant fee, found he could not buy gasoline or any fuel at any price, and ultimately settled for a lame horse. He was allergic to horse dander and suffered asthmatic tortures as he began his house-to-house canvass. He was discouraged when he returned to the Lyonesse Hotel that afternoon. He was just in time to witness the departure of the O.K. Bus Co.

Once again a horde of happy people appeared and boarded the bus. Once again the bus hirpled off down the broken road. Once again the joyous singing broke out.

"I *will* be damned," Addyer wheezed.

He dropped into the County Surveyor's Office for a large scale map of Finney County. It was his intent to plot his mid-wife coverage in accepted statistical manner. There was a little difficulty with the Surveyor who was deaf, blind in one eye and spectacleless in the other. He could not read Addyer's credentials with any faculty or facility. As Addyer finally departed with the map, he said to himself: "I think the old idiot thought I was a spy."

And later he muttered: "Spies?"

And just before bed-time: "Holy Moses! Maybe *that's* the answer to *them*."

That night he was Lincoln's secret agent, anticipating Lee's every move, outwitting Jackson, Johnston and Beauregard, foiling John Wilkes Booth, and being elected President of the United States by 1868.

The next day the O.K. Bus Co. carried off yet another load of happy people.

And the next.

And the next.

"Four hundred tourists in five days," Addyer computed. "The country's filled with espionage."

He began loafing around the streets trying to investigate these joyous travelers. It was difficult. They were furtive before the bus arrived. They had a friendly way of refusing to pass the time. The locals of Lyonesse knew nothing about them and were not interested. Nobody was interested in much more than painful survival these days. That was what made the singing obscene.

After seven days of cloak-and-dagger and seven days of counting, Addyer suddenly did the big take. "It adds up," he said. "Eighty people a day leaving Lyonesse. Five hundred a week. Twenty-five thousand a year. Maybe that's the answer to the population increase." He spent $55 on a telegram to

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Grande with no more than a hope of delivery. The Telegram read: "EUREKA. I HAVE FOUND (IT)"

Can you spare price of lone cup coffee, honorable madam? I am not tramp-handler but destitute life-form.

Addyer's opportunity came the next day. The O.K. Bus Co. pulled in as usual. Another crowd assembled to board the bus, but this time there were too many. Three people were refused passage. They weren't in the least annoyed. They stepped back, waved energetically as the bus started, shouted instructions for future reunions and then quietly turned and started off down the street.

Addyer was out of his hotel room like a shot. He followed the trio down the main street, turned left after them onto Fourth Avenue, passed the ruined schoolhouse, passed the demolished telephone building, passed the gutted library, railroad station, Protestant Church, Catholic Church . . . and finally reached the outskirts of Lyonesse and then open country.

Here he had to be more cautious. It was difficult stalking the spies with so much of the dark road illuminated by warning lights. He wasn't suicidal enough to think of hiding in radiation pits. He hung back in an agony of indecision and was at last relieved to see them turn off the broken road and enter the old Baker farmhouse.

"Ah-ha!" said Addyer.

He sat down at the edge of the road on the remnants of a ram-jet and asked himself: "Ah-ha what?" He could not answer, but he knew where to find the answer. He waited until dusk deepened to darkness and then slowly wormed his way forward toward the farmhouse.

It was while he was creeping between the deadly radiation glows and only occasionally butting his head against grave-markers that he first became aware of two figures in the night. They were in the barnyard of the Baker place and performing most peculiarly. One was tall and thin. A man. He stood stockstill, like a lighthouse. Upon occasion he took a slow, stately step with infinite caution and waved an arm in slow-motion to the other figure. The second was also a man. He was stocky and trotted jerkily back and forth.

As Addyer approached, he heard the tall man say: "Rooo booo fooo mooo hwaaa looo fooo."

Whereupon the trotter chattered: "Wd-nk-kd-ik-md-pd-ld-nk."

Then they both laughed; the tall man like a locomotive, the trotter like a chipmunk. They turned. The trotter rocketed into the house. The tall man drifted in. And that was amazingly that.

"Oh-ho," said Addyer.

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It was at that moment that a pair of hands seized him and lifted him from the ground. Addyer's heart constricted. He had time for one convulsive spasm before something vague was pressed against his face. As he lost consciousness his last idiotic thought was of telescopes.

Can you spare price of solitary coffee for nonloafing unfortunate, honorable sir? Charity will blessings.

When Addyer awoke he was lying on a couch in a small whitewashed room. A gray-haired gentleman with heavy features was seated at a desk alongside the couch, busily ciphering on bits of paper. The desk was cluttered with what appeared to be intricate time-tables. There was a small radio perched on one side.

"L-Listen . . ." Addyer began faintly.

"Just a minute, Mr. Addyer," the gentleman said pleasantly. He fiddled with the radio. A glow germinated in the middle of the room over a circular copper plate and coalesced into a girl. She was extremely nude and extremely attractive. She scurried to the desk, patted the gentleman's head with the speed of a pneumatic hammer. She laughed and chattered: "Wd-nk-tk-ik-lt-nk."

The gray-haired man smiled and pointed to the door. "Go outside and walk it off," he said. She turned and streaked through the door.

"It has something to do with temporal rates," the gentleman said to Addyer. "I don't understand it. When they come forward they've got accumulated momentum." He began ciphering again. "Why in the world did you have to come snooping, Mr. Addyer?"

"You're spies," Addyer said. "She was talking Chinese."

"Hardly. I'd say it was French. Early French. Middle Fifteenth Century."

"Middle Fifteenth Century!" Addyer exclaimed.

"That's what I'd say. You begin to acquire an ear for those stepped-up tempos. Just a minute, please."

He switched the radio on again. Another glow appeared and solidified into a nude man. He was stout, hairy and lugubrious. With exasperating slowness he said: "Mooo fooo blooo wawww hawww pooo."

The gray-haired man pointed to the door. The stout man departed in slow motion.

"The way I see it," the gray-haired man continued conversationally, "when they come back they're swimming against the time current. That slows 'em down. When they come forward, they're swimming with the current. That speeds 'em up. Of course, in any case it doesn't last longer than a few minutes. It wears off."

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"What?" Addyer said. "Time travel?"

"Yes. Of course."

"That thing . . ." Addyer pointed to the radio. "A time machine?"

"That's the idea. Roughly."

"But it's too small."

The gray-haired man laughed.

"What is this place anyway? What are you up to?"

"It's a funny thing," the gray-haired man said. "Everybody used to speculate about time-travel. How it would be used for exploration, archaeology, historical and social research and so on. Nobody ever guessed what the real use would be . . . Therapy."

"Therapy? You mean medical therapy?"

"That's right. Psychological therapy for the misfits who won't respond to any other cure. We let them immigrate. Escape. We've set up stations every quarter century. Stations like this."

"I don't understand."

"This is an immigration office."

"Oh my God!" Addyer shot up from the couch. "Then you're the answer to the population increase. Yes? That's how I happened to notice it. Mortality's up so high and birth's down so low these days that your time-addition becomes significant. Yes?"

"Yes, Mr. Addyer."

"Thousands of you coming here. From where?"

"From the future, of course. Time travel wasn't developed until C/H 127. That's . . . oh say, 2505 A.D. your chronology. We didn't set up our chain of stations until C/H 189."

"But those fast-moving ones. You said they came forward from the past."

"Oh yes, but they're all from the future originally. They just decided they went too far back."

"Too far?"

The gray-haired man nodded and reflected. "It's amusing, the mistakes people will make. They become unrealistic when they read history. Lose contact with facts. Chap I knew . . . wouldn't be satisfied with anything less than Elizabethan times. 'Shakespeare,' he said. 'Good Queen Bess. Spanish Armada. Drake and Hawkins and Raleigh. Most virile period in history. The Golden Age. That's for me.' I couldn't talk sense into him, so we sent him back. Too bad."

"Well?" Addyer asked.

"Oh, he died in three weeks. Drank a glass of water. Typhoid."

"You didn't innoculate him? I mean, the army when it sends men overseas always —"

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"Of course we did. Gave him all the immunization we could. But diseases evolve and change too. New strains develop. Old strains disappear. That's what causes pandemics. Evidently our shots wouldn't take against the Elizabethan typhoid. Excuse me . . ."

Again the glow appeared. Another nude man appeared, chattered briefly and then whipped through the door. He almost collided with the nude girl who poked her head in, smiled and called in a curious accent: "Ie vous prie de me pardonner. Quy estoit cette gentilhomme?"

"I was right," the gray-haired man said. "That's Medieval French. They haven't spoken like that since Rabelais." To the girl he said, "Middle English, please. The American dialect."

"Oh. I'm sorry, Mr. Jelling. I get so damned fouled up with my linguistics. Fouled? Is that right? Or do they say —"

"Hey!" Addyer cried in anguish.

"They say it, but only in private these years. Not before strangers."

"Oh yes. I remember. Who was that gentlemen who just left?"

"Peters."

"From Athena?"

"That's right."

"Didn't like it, eh?"

"Not much. Seems the Peripatetics didn't have plumbing."

"Yes. You begin to hanker for a modern bathroom after a while. Where do I get some clothes . . . or don't they wear clothes this century?"

"No, that's 100 years forward. Go see my wife. She's in the outfitting room in the barn. That's the big red building."

The tall lighthouse-man Addyer had first seen in the farmyard suddenly manifested himself behind the girl. He was now dressed and moving at normal speed. He stared at the girl; she stared at him. "Splem!" they both cried. They embraced and kissed alternate shoulders.

"St'u my rock-ribbering rib-rockery to heart the hearts two," the man said.

"Heart's too, argal, too heart," the girl laughed.

"Eh? Then you st'u too."

They embraced again and left.

"What was that? Future talk?" Addyer asked. "Short-hand?"

"Short-hand?" Jelling exclaimed in a surprised tone. "Don't you know rhetoric when you hear it? That was Thirtieth Century rhetoric, man. They don't talk anything else up there. Prosthesis, Diastole, Epergesis, Metabasis, Hendiadys . . . And they're all born scanning."

"I could scan too if I tried," Addyer muttered enviously.

"You'd find it damned inconvenient trying at your time of life." Jelling

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shook his head, "Because you'd find that living is the sum of conveniences. You might think plumbing is pretty unimportant compared to ancient Greek philosophers. Lots of people do. But the fact is, we already know the philosophy. After a while you get tired of seeing the great men and listening to them expound the material you already know. You begin to miss the conveniences and familiar patterns you used to take for granted."

"That," said Addyer, "is a superficial attitude."

"You think so? Try living in the past by candlelight, without central heating, without refrigeration, canned foods, elementary drugs . . . Or, future-wise, try living with Berganlicks, the Twenty-Two Commandments, Duodecimal calendars and currency, or try speaking in metre, planning and scanning each sentence before you talk . . . and damned for a contemptible illiterate if you forget yourself and speak spontaneously in your own tongue."

"You're exaggerating," Addyer said. "I'll bet there are times where I could be very happy. I've thought about it for years, and I —"

"Tcha!" Jelling snorted. "The great illusion. Name one."

"The American Revolution."

"Pfui! No sanitation. No medicine. Cholera in Philadelphia. Malaria in New York. No anesthesia. The death penalty for hundreds of small crimes and petty infractions. None of the books and music you like best. None of the jobs or professions for which you've been trained. Try again."

"The Victorian Age."

"How are your teeth and eyes? In good shape? They'd better be. We can't send your inlays and glasses back with you. How are your ethics? In bad shape? They'd better be or you'd starve in that cut-throat era. How do you feel about class distinctions? They were pretty strong in those days. What's your religion? You'd better not be Jew or Catholic or Quaker or Moravian or any minority. What's your politics? If you're a reactionary today the same opinions would make you a dangerous radical 100 years ago. I don't think you'd be happy."

"I'd be safe."

"Not unless you were rich; and we can't send money back. Only the flesh. No, Addyer, the poor died at the average age of 40 in those days . . . worked out, worn out. Only the privileged survived and you wouldn't be one of the privileged."

"Not with my superior knowledge?"

Jelling nodded wearily. "I knew *that* would come up sooner or later. What superior knowledge? Your hazy recollection of science and invention? Don't be a damned fool, Addyer. You enjoy your technology without the faintest idea of how it works."

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"It wouldn't have to be hazy recollection. I could prepare."

"What, for instance?"

"Oh . . . say, the radio. I could make a fortune inventing the radio."

Jelling smiled. "You couldn't invent radio until you'd first invented the hundred allied technical discoveries that went into it. You'd have to create an entire new industrial world. You'd have to discover the vacuum rectifier and create an industry to manufacture it; the carborundum crystal rectifier, the self-heterodyne circuit, the non-radiating neutrodyne receiver and so forth. You'd have to develop electric power production and transmission and alternating current. You'd have to — but why belabor the obvious? Could you invent internal combustion before the development of fuel oils?"

"My God!" Addyer groaned.

"And another thing," Jelling went on grimly. "I've been talking about technological tools, but language is a tool too; the tool of communication. Did you ever realize that all the studying you might do could never teach you how a language was really used centuries ago? Do you know how the Romans pronounced Latin? Do you know the Greek dialects? Could you learn to speak and think in Gaelic, Seventeenth Century Flemish, Old Low German? Never! You'd be a deaf-mute."

"I never thought about it that way," Addyer said slowly.

"Escapists never do. All they're looking for is a vague excuse to run away."

"What about books? I could memorize a great book and —"

"And what? Go back far enough into the past to anticipate the real author? You'd be anticipating the public too. A book doesn't become great until the public's ready to understand it. It doesn't become profitable until the public's ready to buy it."

"What about going forward into the future?" Addyer asked.

"I've already told you. It's the same problem only in reverse. Could a medieval man survive in the Twentieth Century? Could he stay alive in street traffic? Drive cars? Speak the language? Think in the language? Adapt to the tempo, ideas and coordinations you take for granted? Never. Could someone from the Twenty-fifth Century adapt to the Thirtieth? Never."

"Well then," Addyer said angrily, "If the past and future are so dreadful, what are those people traveling around for?"

"They're not traveling," Jelling said. "They're running."

"From what?"

"Their own time."

"Why?"

"They don't like it."

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"Why not?"

"Do you like yours? Does any neurotic?"

"Where are they going?"

"Any place but where they belong. They keep looking for the Golden Age. Tramps! Time-stiffs! Never satisfied. Always searching, shifting . . . bumming through the centuries. Pfui! Half the panhandlers you meet are probably time-bums stuck in the wrong century."

"And those people coming here . . . they think *this* is a Golden Age?"

"They do . . . for a while."

"They're crazy," Addyer protested. "Have they seen the ruins? The radiation? The war? The anxiety? The hysteria?"

"Sure. That's what appeals to them. Don't ask me to explain. Think of it this way: You like the American Colonial period, yes?"

"Among others."

"Well, if you told Mr. George Washington the reasons why you liked his time, you'd probably be naming everything he hated about it."

"But that's not a fair comparison. This is the worst age in all history."

Jelling waved his hand. "That's how it looks to you. Everybody says that in every generation; but take my word for it, no matter when you live and how you live, there's always somebody else somewhere else who thinks you live in the Golden Age."

"Well I'll be damned," Addyer said.

Jelling looked at him steadily for a long moment. "You will be," he said sorrowfully. "I've got bad news for you, Addyer. We can't let you remain. You'll talk and make trouble, and our secret's got to be kept. We'll have to send you out one-way."

"I can talk wherever I go."

"But nobody'll pay attention to you outside your own time. You won't make sense. You'll be an eccentric . . . a lunatic . . . a foreigner . . . safe."

"What if I come back?"

"You won't be able to get back without a visa, and I'm not tattooing any visa on you. You won't be the first we've had to transport, if that's any consolation to you. There was a Jap, I remember —"

"Then you're going to send me somewhere in time? Permanently?"

"That's right. I'm really very sorry."

"To the future or the past?"

"You can take your choice. Think it over while you're getting undressed."

"You don't have to act so mournful," Addyer said. "It's a great adventure. A high adventure. It's something I've always dreamed."

"That's right. It's going to be wonderful."

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"I could refuse," Addyer said nervously.

Jelling shook his head. "We'd only drug you and send you anyway. It might as well be your choice."

"It's a choice I'm delighted to make."

"Sure. That's the spirit, Addyer."

"Everybody always said I was born 100 years too soon."

"Everybody generally says that . . . unless they say you were born 100 years too late."

"Some people said that too."

"Well, think it over. It's a permanent move. Which would you prefer . . . the phonetic future or the poetic past?"

Very slowly Addyer began to undress, as he undressed each night when he began the prelude to his customary phantasy. But now his dreams were faced with fulfillment and the moment of decision terrified him. He was a little blue and rather unsteady on his legs when he stepped to the copper disc in the center of the floor. In answer to Jelling's inquiry he muttered his choice. Then he turned argent in the aura of an incandescent glow and disappeared from his time forever.

Where did he go? You know. I know. Addyer knows. Addyer traveled to the land of Our pet phantasy. He escaped into the refuge that is Our refuge, to the time of Our dreams; and in practically no time at all he realized that he had in truth departed from the only time for himself.

Through the vistas of the years every age but our own seems glamorous and golden. We yearn for the yesterdays and tomorrows, never realizing that we are faced with Hobson's Choice . . . that today, bitter or sweet, anxious or calm, is the only day for us. The dream of time is the traitor, and we are all accomplices to the betrayal of ourselves.

Can you spare price of one coffee, honorable sir? No, sir, I am not panhandling organism. I am starveling Japanese transient stranded in this so-miserable year. Honorable sir! I beg in tears for holy charity. Will you donate to this destitute person one ticket to township of Lyonesse? I want to beg on knees for visa. I want to go back to year 1945 again. I want to be in Hiroshima again. I want to go home.

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Mr. Cohan, Gavagan's bartender, is a stern advocate of moderate tippling. But when a Dane deprecates an Irishman's capacity, even Mr. Cohan will permit an exception to his own rule. So we now see him presiding over the only drinking bout ever held in Gavagan's Bar, a truly Homeric contest — with the usual unexpected ending that seems to characterize events at that wondrous saloon.

The Ancestral Amethyst

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP *and*
FLETCHER PRATT

"We were very good to the Swedes when they ruled over us in Bornholm 300 years ago," said the stocky man, downing his cherry brandy at a gulp and motioning Mr. Cohan for a refill. "We had to kill all of them one night. While it was being done, some of our people ran into the church and rang the church bells, so that the souls of all the Swedes should rise to heaven on the music. For several hours they continued to pull the ropes, although it was terribly hard work for their arms and they became very tired."

The second cherry brandy followed the first. Professor Thott contemplated the bald cranium, surrounded by a crescent of pale hair, and said thoughtfully, "I can perceive that you Danes are tender hearted."

"That is most true," said the stocky man. His whole face was covered by a network of tiny red lines. "But it is not always for us — how do the English say it? — beer and skating. I remember —"

The door opened and he checked as into Gavagan's came a tall, thin knobby policeman, accompanied by a small man with sharp eyes, in a neat blue serge suit. The policeman extended a hand across the bar to Mr. Cohan, who shook it fervently. "How are you, Julius?" "How are you, my boy?" Then he turned to face the others.

"Hello, Professor," he said to Thott. "Meet my friend, Mr. McClintock."

There was more handshaking. Thott said, "This is Captain Axel Ewaldt, of the Danish merchant marine, Officer Cohan, Mr. McClintock. Shall we have a round? He was just telling a story to illustrate how sentimental the Danes are. Make mine a rye highball, Mr. Cohan."

"Just a sherry," said McClintock. "A people of high moral standards. They have less crime than any nation in Europe."

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Captain Ewaldt beamed; Patrolman Cohan said, "Mr. McClintock gives talks on crime. He's just been over to the Police Boys' Club doing it. He's an expert."

"I have often wondered how one became an expert on crime," said Professor Thott, meditatively.

"By personal association in my case," said McClintock. "I don't in the least mind telling you, not in the least. Until the grace of the Lord came upon me, I was engaged in criminal activity. The title of my talk is 'Crime does not pay,' and I am happy to say my efforts have been rewarding."

Patrolman Cohan said, "This was known as Dippie Louie. He was a left breech hook and could kiss the dog."

Professor Thott gazed at Dippie Louie with polite interest, but Ewaldt said: "Some schnapps, Mr. Cohan. This cherry makes one cold inside, and a man should warm himself." He addressed the officer, "Be so good to explain. I am not understanding."

"A left breech hook can lift a poke — beg pardon, take a wallet out of a man's left breeches pocket. And kissing the dog means he can do it while standing face to face."

"A highly skilled profession," said McClintock. "Ah, my friends, if the effort and training expended on criminal activity were only employed in the service of humanity, we would not —"

Thott said, rather hastily, "You were going to tell us about the Danes being kind-hearted, Captain Ewaldt."

"That is correct," said the Captain. "I was yust remembering how I am in the city of Boston one St. Patrick's Day, walking down the dock and minding my own business. Along comes this big Irishman, and anybody can see he has too much to drink, and because I do not have green on for the day, he pushes me. Once is all right, but the second time, I got my little Danish up, and I pushed him in the water — with my fist. But I was really very good to him, because if I have not done this, he would be falling in the water to drown after dark when there is nobody to rescue him."

Mr. Cohan gave an inarticulate sound, but it was McClintock who said, "What makes you so certain?"

"More schnapps, please. Because this is early in the morning, and he would be drinking more all day, and everyone knows that an Irishman can not drink all day without falling down."

Patrolman Cohan gave an inarticulate sound; Mr. Cohan put both hands on the bar and said, "And would you be saying, now, that youse Swedes can hold your liquor better than the Irish that's brought up on it? Go on!"

"I am not Swedish," said Ewaldt, "yust a good Danish man. And I am saying that I am brought up on the island of Bornholm, and I can drink

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three times as much as any Irishman. I am telling you that right now."

"Would you care to bet on that, now?" said Mr. Cohan, dangerously.

"It is too little. Five dollars valuta will not even buy the schnapps I am drinking."

"Think pretty well of yourself, don't you?" said Mr. Cohan. "I can see now that you must be real artist at drinking." Patrolman Cohan snickered at this brilliant sarcasm as Mr. Cohan went on. "Not but what everyone should have something to be proud of. But if you feel that way about it, maybe you'd be liking to have a little contest for $25, and the loser pays?"

"That I will do," Ewaldt said. "You are drinking with me?"

"Not me, me fine young felly," said Mr. Cohan. "I have the bar and all to take care of, and it would be worth the best part of me neck if Gavagan come in and found me trying to drink down one of the trade. But Dippie Louie here, he has more than a drop of the right blood in him, and I call to mind many's the time I've seen him lay away his share."

"It was the cause of my ruin and my descent into crime," said McClintock. "But I undeniably possess a special ability to absorb the drink. It's because my ancestors come from Galway, it is, where the wind blows so cold that if a man drinks water and then goes out of doors, he's no better than an icicle."

"I am not wanting to ruin you again," said Ewaldt.

Patrolman Cohan spoke up: "You'll not be ruining Louie McClintock, that drank down the Bohemian champion at the truck drivers' picnic. And besides, I'm here meself to see that he gets home all right."

McClintock gravely extended his hand and took Ewaldt's. "For the honor of old Eire," he said. "Twenty-five dollars and the loser pays the bills. What shall we drink?"

"Schnapps some kind. It is no matter to me."

Mr. Cohan set an opened bottle of Irish whiskey on the bar, produced a couple of Scotch-and-soda glasses and filled them halfway up, adjusting the liquid level with meticulous care. "Skaal!" said Ewaldt, and tossed his off as though it were a pony. McClintock went more slowly, rolling the last mouthful around his tongue before he sank it, and said: "Fill them again."

Thott said, "I think that, to be perfectly fair, a slight interval should be allowed for the — ah, dissipation of the shock effect. Mr. McClintock, if I am not too importunate, may I ask what led you to change professions?"

"Education," said McClintock. "Education and the grace of God. I took a correspondence course in writing short stories while I was in Dannemora." He reached for his glass, which Mr. Cohan had loaded again. "Ah, up Eire!" The two Cohans nodded approval, and Thott raised his own glass in salutation. Ewaldt drained his potion off without lifting an eyebrow, tapped the glass with a fingernail and pushed it toward Mr. Cohan. The bartender

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reached back for another bottle of Irish and refilled the glasses to the top.

Ewaldt beamed. "In my country," he said, "we drink not to the country, but to all the pretty girls. Now I have drunk with you to your country, and you are drinking with me to all the pretty girls in Denmark. Skaal!"

His third glass of Irish followed the course of the other two with the same easy, fluid motion. McClintock again took a little more time. There was a slight frown in the middle of his forehead, and he appeared to be considering something quite seriously.

"It was the prison chaplain, God bless his soul," he said. "He explained to me that the gains from the profession of crime were b'no means equal to the effort expended. He made me see, he told me that . . ." He turned halfway round and emitted a large burp.

Patrolman Cohan gazed earnestly at him, then turned toward the others and began talking rapidly: "Did I ever tell you, now, about the time I found me own wife in the paddy wagon, and her mad enough to have the left leg of me, and saying it was all my fault? It was —" He laid a hand on McClintock's shoulder, but Dippie Louie shook it off.

"I'm okay," he said. "Fill them up again."

"You are not to be drinking so fast," said Ewaldt evenly. "That is how a man is — how do you say it? — be-drunken, unless he is Danish."

"I tell you I'm all right," said McClintock, "and I know how fast I can put it away. Fill them up again, Mr. Cohan."

Professor Thott said, "As a matter of fact, there's something in what the Captain says, though not quite for that reason. It's a question of liquefaction, of the body not being able to absorb any more liquid in any form. Fix me another Manhattan, will you, Mr. Cohan?"

"A Manhattan?" said Ewaldt. "I am remembering them; they are good. You will please to make me one, also." He addressed McClintock with a pleasant smile. "This is not part of the contest, but an extra for pleasure. But you are correct, Mr. Professor. I shall relieve myself."

He started toward the toilet, but was detained by a cry from McClintock. "Hey, no you don't! I seen that one pulled the time I drank against the three Stranahans in Chi."

"Why don't you both go?" said Thott. "With Patrolman Cohan to see there's no foul play. After all, he represents the law, and can be trusted to be impartial."

As the trio disappeared through the door, he turned to Mr. Cohan. "I hate to say it, but I think your friend Dippie Louie is beginning to come apart along the seams."

"Don't you believe it, now," said Mr. Cohan. "No more than Finn MacCool did when he met the Scotch giant and his wife baked the stove-

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lids in the cakes. That's just the way of him. Would you like to make a side-bet now, that he won't have that Swede under the bar-rail?"

"A dollar," said Thott, and they shook hands across the bar as the three emerged to find the Manhattans and glasses of Irish lined up. Ewaldt disposed of his Irish as rapidly as before, then picked up the Manhattan and began to sip it delicately. He turned to McClintock. "You are the very good drinker for an Irishman. I salute you, as you did. Hop, Eire!"

The Manhattan followed the whiskey. There seemed to be something slightly wrong with McClintock's throat as he accepted the toast. Patrolman Cohan took on an anxious look and Mr. Cohan an inquiring one, but Ewaldt merely indicated with a gesture that he wanted a refill on both drinks. McClintock gazed at his portion of whiskey with a kind of fearful fascination, swallowed once, and then began to sip it, with his Adam's apple moving rapidly. Ewaldt slid his down as before, and picked up the Manhattan. "These I pay for," he said.

McClintock said, "It was him that gave me the office, just like I'm telling you. I was in with a couple of right gees, too, jug-heisters, but. . . . but mark my words, friends, *crime does not pay.*"

"I never thought I'd live to see the day," said Patrolman Cohan. "A bottle apiece. Louie, you're a credit to the race."

"That is very true," said Ewaldt. "After the Danes, the Poles are the best drinkers. Now we shall change to something else, since you have been making the first choice. Mr. Cohan, you have the Russian vodka?"

"No' for me," said McClintock. "No' for me." He looked at Thott solemnly, blinked his eyes twice, and said, "You're right, perfesser. Need time for shock effec'. Think I'll sit down for a minute before next round."

He took four or five long steps to one of the tables and sat down heavily, staring straight before him. Ewaldt, on whom no effect was visible beyond a slight reddening of the nose, said, "Now I have won and it is to pay me."

"Not yet," said Patrolman Cohan. "He isn't out, just resting between rounds. He'll come back." His voice seemed to lack conviction.

"It's the most marvellous thing I've ever seen," said Thott, looking at Ewaldt with an awe tinged with envy.

"Ah, it's not for me to speak," said Mr. Cohan, pouring the vodka, into an ordinary shot glass this time. "But the way I was brought up, it's not healthy to be mixing your liquor like that."

"Tell me, Captain," said Thott, "how do you do it? Training?"

Ewaldt downed his vodka. "It is only because I am Danish. In my country no one is be-drunken except foolish young men who go down the Herregade and have their shoes shined on Saturday night while they make calls to the girls that pass, but I am too old for that. But some Danes are better drinkers

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than others. We have in Denmark a story that the best are those who have from their forefathers one of the *aedelstanar* — amethysts. Observe."

His hand went to the watch-chain and the end came out of his vest pocket. Instead of penknife, key-ring or other make-weight, the chain ended in a large purplish stone with an old-fashioned gold setting.

"In the olden times, 600 years ago," Ewaldt continued, "there were many of them. They were the protection against be-drunkenhood, to place in the bottom of the winecup, and most of them belonged to bishops, from which it is easy to see that the church is very sober."

Thott peered over the tops of his glasses. "Interesting. It was a regular medieval idea; the word amethyst itself means anti-drunkenness, you know. Did you get yours from a bishop?"

Ewaldt tucked his pocket-piece away, and gave a little laugh. "No, this one is descended to me from Tycho Brahe. They are saying he was a magician, but nobody believes that, at all."

He turned to face McClintock, who had returned to the bar and placed one hand on it. "How is it my friend? Shall we have one more little bit?"

The Irish champion was visibly shaken, but still game. "One more it is," he said, and as Mr. Cohan poured the potation, reached out a hand and placed it on Ewaldt's shoulder. "Thish — this will be something for the boys to be telling about. You're a goo' man, Cap'n, a goo' man."

As he turned to pick up his glass with the other hand, he seemed to get his feet twisted and stumbled against Ewaldt, clutching at him for support as though he were trying to climb the Captain's frame. "Oops," said McClintock. "Sorry. I didn' mean —"

"It is no trouble," said Ewaldt, and picked up his glass. If anything he was a little faster than usual in emptying it.

McClintock said, "The only, only time I have trouble with my liquor ish when I'm drinking beer with six Germans in Buffalo. It fills you up and you got no room for what you ought to drink."

"There was never a truer word spoken than that," said Mr. Cohan, and then to Thott. "See? My man's getting his second wind."

"He must have a second stomach," said Thott admiringly, as McClintock smacked his lips and set down his glass.

"If you'll be having many more," said Mr. Cohan, pouring from a new bottle, "you'll be switching drinks. This will be the last bottle of Irish I have."

"'S all the shame — same to me," said McClintock. "Make the next one bourbon. How's with you, Captain?"

A line of frown had appeared in the middle of Ewaldt's forehead, and he nodded ponderously. "All schnapps are good," he said. "But this is to change the duel. What goes if he is for-better with one than I with the other?"

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"You can take that up later," said Patrolman Cohan.

Ewaldt gloomily picked up his glass and downed the contents. He seemed to have lost some of his *brio*.

Thott said, "I'll tell you how to make it perfectly fair. On the next round, Mr. Cohan can fill the glasses with a little from each of four or five different bottles. That will take care of any differences in individual response, and I know Captain Ewaldt won't mind, because he has been mixing his drinking anyway. How about you, McClintock?"

The small man shrugged. "Dobey with me," he said.

Mr. Cohan seemed about to protest this violation of the principles of sound drinking, but he only clucked and produced a shot glass, which he loaded from one bottle after another before emptying it into the larger vessels. There was a silence in Gavagan's. Ewaldt's frown had deepened and he was gazing at the stuffed owl as though it held a secret of profound philosophical significance. He reached out boldly for the glass, but his hand seemed a trifle unsteady as he grasped it, and he opened his mouth wider than usual as he poured it down.

McClintock, as usual, drank more slowly, then said: "T'hell with slew-foots!"

"Now see here—" began Patrolman Cohan, then, "Look!"

The others turned to see Ewaldt apparently in the throes of a revolution. A fine perspiration had broken out on his forehead and the network of lines had run together into a kind of mottling. "Aqvavit!" he said, clutching at the bar.

Mr. Cohan gave him the kind of glance reserved for suspicious characters, but poured it in the shot glass. Ewaldt half-leaned over to clutch it, got it down and brought one foot up to feel for the bar-rail. He missed it, and without its support the leg seemed to have no more stiffness than a rubber band. The Captain took a heavy list to starboard, grabbed for the bar again, missed that too, and came down hard on the floor.

As Thott and Patrolman Cohan bent to help him, Dippie Louie McClintock suddenly struck a hand against his forehead.

"Julius!" he wailed, and Thott saw a big tear come out on his cheek. "You should have stopped me when you seen me making that score! You know that when I drink, I just can't resist the temptation. Don't tell anyone that I did it, will you, or I'll lose my job at the fish-market. Here, take it."

He held out the amethyst, detached from its chain, thrust it into Patrolman Cohan's hand, then in his turn swayed, missed a grab at the bar, and joined Ewaldt on the floor.

Mr. Cohan put both hands on the bar and leaned across to look. "I get the dollar," he said. "The Swede is under the bar-rail."

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"Never a prolific writer, Leslie P. Hartley has nevertheless written some of the most arresting macabre tales in the language," August Derleth justly observed on the jacket of Mr. Hartley's only American collection of short stories, THE TRAVELLING GRAVE *(Arkham, 1948). In a quarter of a century, Hartley has produced only a handful of terror stories; but no one who has read it has ever forgotten the grisly counterpoint of gaiety and grue in* The Visitor from Down Under, *and a few others are nearly as memorable. We feel that the latest Hartley (published in England last January, and here presented for the first time in America) is one of his finest achievements yet in the subtle domain of psychological horror: a new variation on a classic Pirandellian theme, with a keen perception of the inevitable relation of the haunt to the psyche of the haunted.*

W. S.

by L. P. HARTLEY

THE first postcard came from Forfar.

I thought you might like a picture of Forfar. You have always been so interested in Scotland, and that is one reason why I am interested in you. I have enjoyed all your books, but do you really get to grips with people? I doubt it. Try to think of this as a handshake from your devoted admirer.

W. S.

Like other novelists, Walter Streeter was used to getting communications from strangers. Usually they were friendly but sometimes they were critical. In either case he always answered them, for he was conscientious. But answering them took up the time and energy he needed for his writing, so that he was rather relieved that W. S. had given no address. The photograph of Forfar was uninteresting and he tore it up. His anonymous correspondent's criticism, however, lingered in his mind. Did he really fail to come to grips with his characters? Perhaps he did. He was aware that in most cases they were either projections of his own personality or, in different forms, the antitheses of it. The Me and the Not Me. Perhaps W. S. had spotted this. Not for the first time Walter made a vow to be more objective.

About ten days later came another postcard.

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What do you think of Berwick-on-Tweed? Like you, it's on the Border. I hope this doesn't sound rude. I don't mean that you are a border-line case! You know how much I admire your stories. Some people call them other-worldly. I think you should plump for one world or the other. Another warm handshake from. W. S.

Walter Streeter pondered over this and began to wonder about the sender. Was his correspondent a man or a woman? It looked like a man's handwriting — commercial, un-selfconscious, and the criticism was like a man's. On the other hand, it was like a woman to probe — to want to make him feel at the same time flattered and unsure of himself. He felt the faint stirrings of curiosity but soon dismissed them; he was not a man to experiment with acquaintances. Still, it was odd to think of this unknown person speculating about him, sizing him up. Other-worldly, indeed! He re-read the last two chapters he had written. Perhaps they didn't have their feet firm on the ground. Perhaps he was too ready to escape, as other novelists were nowadays, into an ambiguous world, a world where the conscious mind did not have things too much its own way. But did that matter? He threw the picture of Berwick-on-Tweed into his November fire and tried to write; but the words came haltingly, as though contending with an extra-strong barrier of self-criticism. And as the days passed, he became uncomfortably aware of self-division, as though someone had taken hold of his personality and was pulling it apart. His work was no longer homogeneous; there were two strains in it, unreconciled and opposing, and it went much slower as he tried to resolve the discord. Never mind, he thought: perhaps I was getting into a groove. These difficulties may be growing pains; I may have tapped a new source of supply. If only I could make the conflict fruitful!"

The third postcard showed a picture of York Minster.

I know you are interested in cathedrals. I'm sure this isn't a sign of megalomania in your case, but smaller churches are sometimes more rewarding. I'm seeking a good many churches on my way south. Are you busy writing or are you looking round for ideas? Another hearty handshake from your friend. W. S.

It was true that Walter Streeter was interested in cathedrals. Lincoln Cathedral had been the subject of one of his youthful fantasies and he had written about it in a travel book. And it was also true that he admired mere size and was inclined to undervalue parish churches. But how could W. S. have known that? And was it really a sign of megalomania? And who was W. S., anyhow?

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For the first time it struck him that the initials were his own. No, not for the first time. He had noticed it before, but they were such commonplace initials; they were Gilbert's, they were Maugham's, they were Shakespeare's — a common possession. Anyone might have them. Yet now it seemed to him an odd coincidence; and the idea came into his mind — suppose I have been writing postcards to myself? People did such things, especially people with split personalities. Not that he was one of them, of course. And yet there were these unexplained developments — the dichotomy in his writing, which had now extended from his thought to his style, making one paragraph languorous with semi-colons and subordinate clauses, and another sharp and incisive with main verbs and full-stops.

He looked at the handwriting again. It had seemed the perfection of ordinariness — anybody's hand — so ordinary as perhaps to be disguised. Now he fancied he saw in it resemblances to his own. He was just going to pitch the postcard in the fire when suddenly he decided not to. I'll show it to somebody, he thought.

His friend said, "My dear fellow, it's all quite plain. The woman's a lunatic. I'm sure it's a woman. She has probably fallen in love with you and wants to make you interested in her. I should pay no attention whatsoever. People in the public eye are always getting letters from lunatics. If they worry you, destroy them without reading them. That sort of person is often a little psychic, and if she senses that she's getting a rise out of you, she'll go on."

For a moment Walter Streeter felt reassured. A woman, a little mouse-like creature, who had somehow taken a fancy to him! What was there to feel uneasy about in that? Then his subconscious mind, searching for something to torment him with, and assuming the authority of logic, said: Supposing those postcards are a lunatic's, and you are writing them to yourself?

He tried to put the thought away from him; he tried to destroy the postcard as he had the others. But something in him wanted to preserve it. It had become a piece of him, he felt. Yielding to an irresistible compulsion, which he dreaded, he found himself putting it behind the clock on the chimney-piece. He couldn't see it, but he knew that it was there.

He now had to admit to himself that the postcard business had become a leading factor in his life. It had created a new area of thoughts and feelings.

Yet when the next postcard came it took him completely by surprise. He could not bring himself to look at the picture.

I am coming nearer. I have got as near as Warwick Castle. Perhaps we shall come to grips after all. I advised you to come to grips with your characters, didn't I? Have I given you any new ideas? If I have,

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you ought to thank me, for they are what novelists want, I understand. I have been re-reading your novels, living in them, I might say. Je vous serre la main. As always. W. S.

A wave of panic surged up in Walter Streeter. How was it that he had never noticed, all this time, the most significant fact about the postcards — that each one came from a place geographically closer to him than the last? *I am coming nearer.* Had his mind, unconsciously self-protective, worn blinkers? If it had, he wished he could put them back. He took an atlas and idly traced out W. S.'s itinerary. An interval of 80 miles or so seemed to separate the stopping-places. Walter lived in a large West Country town about 80 miles from Warwick.

Should he show the postcards to an alienist? But what could an alienist tell him? He would not know, what Walter wanted to know, whether he had anything to fear from W. S.

Better go to the police. The police were used to dealing with poison-pens. If they laughed at him, so much the better.

They did not laugh, however. They said they thought the postcards were a hoax and that W. S. would never show up in the flesh. Then they asked if there was anyone who had a grudge against him. "No one that I know of," Walter said. They, too, took the view that the writer was probably a woman. They told him not to worry but to let them know if further postcards came.

A little comforted, Walter went home. The talk with the police had done him good. He thought it over. It was quite true what he had told them — that he had no enemies. He was not a man of strong personal feelings; such feelings as he had went into his books. In his books he had drawn some pretty nasty characters. Not of recent years, however. Of recent years he had felt a reluctance to draw a very bad man or woman: he thought it morally irresponsible and artistically unconvincing, too. There was good in everyone: Iagos were a myth. Latterly — but he had to admit that it was several weeks since he laid pen to paper, so much had this ridiculous business of the postcards weighed upon his mind — if he had to draw a really wicked person he represented him as a Communist or a Nazi — someone who had deliberately put off his human characteristics. But in the past, when he was younger and more inclined to see things as black or white, he had let himself go once or twice. He did not remember his old books very well but there was a character in one, *The Pariah,* into whom he had really got his knife. He had written about him with extreme vindictiveness, just as if he were a real person whom he was trying to show up. He had experienced a curious pleasure in attributing every kind of wickedness to this man. He never gave him the benefit of the doubt. He never felt a twinge of pity for him, even when

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he paid the penalty for his misdeeds on the gallows. He had so worked himself up that the idea of this dark creature, creeping about brim-full of malevolence, had almost frightened him.

Odd that he couldn't remember the man's name. He took the book down from the shelf and turned the pages — even now they affected him uncomfortably. Yes, here it was, William . . . . William . . . he would have to look back to find the surname. William Stainsforth.

His own initials.

He did not think the coincidence meant anything, but it colored his mind and weakened its resistance to his obsession. So uneasy was he that when the next postcard came, it came as a relief.

"I am quite close now," he read, and involuntarily turned the postcard over. The splendid central tower of Gloucester Cathedral met his eye. He stared at it as if it could tell him something, then with an effort went on reading:

> My movements, as you may have guessed, are not quite under my control, but all being well, I look forward to seeing you some time this week-end. Then we can really come to grips. I wonder if you'll recognise me! It won't be the first time you have given me hospitality. Ti serro la mano. As always. W. S.

Walter took the postcard straight to the police station, and asked if he could have police protection over the week-end. The officer in charge smiled at him and said he was quite sure it was a hoax; but he would send someone to keep an eye on the place.

"You still have no idea who it would be?" he asked.

Walter shook his head.

It was Tuesday; Walter Streeter had plenty of time to think about the week-end. At first he felt he would not be able to live through the interval but, strange to say, his confidence increased instead of waning. He set himself to work as though he could work, and presently he found he could — differently from before, and, he thought, better. It was as though the nervous strain he had been living under had, like an acid, dissolved a layer of non-conductive thought that came between him and his subject: he was nearer to it now, and instead of responding only too readily to his stage directions, his characters responded wholeheartedly and with all their beings to the tests he put them to. So passed the days, and the dawn of Friday seemed like any other day until something jerked him out of his self-induced trance and suddenly he asked himself, "When does a week-end begin?"

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A long week-end begins on Friday. At that his panic returned. He went to the street door and looked out. It was a suburban, unfrequented street of detached Regency houses like his own. They had tall square gateposts, some crowned with semi-circular iron brackets holding lanterns. Most of these were out of repair: only two or three were ever lit. A car went slowly down the street; some people crossed it: everything was normal.

Several times that day he went to look and saw nothing suspicious, and when Saturday came, bringing no postcard, his panic had almost subsided. He nearly rang up the police to tell them not to bother to send anyone after all.

They were as good as their word: they did send someone. Between tea and dinner, the time when week-end guests most commonly arrive, Walter went to the door and there, between two unlit gateposts, he saw a policeman standing — the first policeman he had ever seen in Charlotte Street. At the sight, and the relief it brought him, he realised how anxious he had been. Now he felt safer than he had ever felt in his life, and also a little ashamed at having given extra trouble to a hard-worked body of men. Should he go and speak to his unknown guardian, offer him a cup of tea and a drink? It would be nice to hear him laugh at Walter's fancies. But no — somehow he felt his security the greater when its source was impersonal and anonymous. "P. C. Smith" was somehow less impressive than "police protection."

Several times from an upper window (he didn't like to open the door and stare) he made sure that his guardian was still there; and once, for added proof, he asked his housekeeper to verify the strange phenomenon. Disappointingly, she came back saying she had seen no policeman; but she was not very good at seeing things, and when Walter went a few minutes later, he saw him plain enough. The man must walk about, of course; perhaps he had been taking a stroll when Mrs. Kendal looked.

It was contrary to his routine to work after dinner but tonight he did — he felt so much in the vein. Indeed, a sort of exaltation possessed him; the words ran off his pen; it would be foolish to check the creative impulse for the sake of a little extra sleep. On, on. They were right who said the small hours were the time to work. When his housekeeper came in to say good-night, he scarcely raised his eyes.

In the warm, snug little room the silence purred around him like a kettle. He did not even hear the door-bell till it had been ringing for some time.

A visitor at this hour?

His knees trembling, he went to the door, scarcely knowing what he expected to find; so what was his relief, on opening it, to see the doorway filled by the tall figure of a policeman. Without waiting for the man to speak:

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"Come in, come in, my dear fellow," he exclaimed. He held his hand out, but the policeman did not take it. "You must have been very cold standing out there. I didn't know that it was snowing, though," he added, seeing the snow-flakes on the policeman's cape and helmet. "Come in and warm yourself."

"Thanks," said the policeman. "I don't mind if I do."

Walter knew enough of the phrases used by men of the policeman's stamp not to mistake this for a grudging acceptance. "This way," he prattled on. "I was writing in my study. By Jove, it *is* cold. I'll turn the gas on more. Now won't you take your traps off, and make yourself at home?"

"I can't stay long," the policeman said, "I've got a job to do, as *you* know."

"Oh, yes," said Walter, "such a silly job, a sinecure." He stopped, wondering if the policeman would know what a sinecure was. "I suppose you know what it's about — the postcards?"

The policeman nodded.

"But nothing can happen to me as long as you are here," said Walter. "I shall be as safe . . . as safe as houses. Stay as long as you can, and have a drink."

"I never drink on duty," said the policeman. Still in his cape and helmet, he looked round. "So this is where you work?" he said.

"Yes, I was writing when you rang."

"Some poor chap's for it, I expect," the policeman said.

"Oh, why?" Walter was hurt by his unfriendly tone, and noticed how hard his eyes were.

"I'll tell you in a minute," said the policeman, and then the telephone bell rang. Walter excused himself and hurried from the room.

"This is the police station," said a voice. "Is that Mr. Streeter?"

Walter said it was.

"Well, Mr. Streeter, how is everything at your place? All right, I hope? I'll tell you why I ask. I'm sorry to say we quite forgot about that little job we were going to do for you. Bad co-ordination, I'm afraid."

"But," said Walter, "you did send someone."

"No, Mr. Streeter, I'm afraid we didn't."

"But there's a policeman here, here in this very house."

There was a pause, then his interlocutor said, in a less casual voice,

"He can't be one of our chaps. Did you see his number by any chance?"

"No."

Another pause and the voice said,

"Would you like us to send somebody now?"

"Yes, p—— please."

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"All right then, we'll be with you in a jiffy."

Walter put back the receiver. What now? he asked himself. Should he barricade the door? Should he run out into the street? While he was debating, the door opened and his guest came in.

"No room's private when the street door's once passed," he said. "Had you forgotten I was a policeman?"

"Was?" said Walter, edging away from him. "You *are* a policeman."

"I have been other things as well," the policeman said. "Thief, pimp, blackmailer, not to mention murderer. *You* should know."

The policeman, if such he was, seemed to be moving towards him and Walter suddenly became alive to the importance of small distances — from the sideboard to the table, from one chair to another.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "Why do you speak like that? I've never done you any harm. I've never set eyes on you before."

"Oh, haven't you?" the man said. "But you've thought about me, and —" his voice rose — "and you've written about me. You got some fun out of me, didn't you? Now I'm going to get some fun out of you. You made me just as nasty as you could. Wasn't that doing me harm? You didn't think what it would be like to be me, did you? You didn't put yourself in my place, did you? You hadn't any pity for me, had you? Well, I'm not going to have any pity for you."

"But I tell you," cried Walter, fingering the table's edge, "I don't know you!"

"And now you say you don't know me! You did all that to me and then forget me!" His voice became a whine, charged with self-pity. "You forgot William Stainsforth."

"William Stainsforth!"

"Yes. I was your scapegoat, wasn't I? You unloaded all your self-dislike on me. You felt pretty good while you were writing about me. Now, as one W. S. to another, what shall I do, if I behave in character?"

"I —— I don't know," muttered Walter.

"You don't know?" Stainsforth sneered. "You ought to know, you fathered me. What would William Stainsforth do if he met his old dad in a quiet place, his kind old dad who made him swing?"

Walter could only stare at him.

"You know what he'd do as well as I," said Stainsforth. Then his face changed and he said abruptly, "No you don't, because you never really understood me. I'm not so black as you painted me." He paused and a flame of hope flickered in Walter's breast. "You never gave me a chance, did you? Well, I'm going to give you one. That shows you never understood me, doesn't it?"

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Walter nodded and said nothing.

"You admit that?" said William Stainsforth grimly. "Well, if you can tell me of one virtue you ever credited me with — just one kind thought — just one redeeming feature —"

"Yes," said Walter, trembling.

"Well, then I'll let you off."

"And if I can't?" whispered Walter.

"Well, then, that's just too bad. We'll have to come to grips and you know what that means. You took off one of my arms but I've still got the other. 'Stainsforth of the iron arm', you called me."

Walter began to pant.

"I'll give you two minutes to remember," Stainsforth announced in final tones.

They both looked at the clock. At first the stealthy movement of the hand paralysed Walter's thought. He stared at William Stainsforth's face, his cruel and crafty face, which seemed to be always in shadow, as if it was something the light could not touch. Desperately he searched his memory for the one fact that would save him; but his memory, clenched like a fist, would give up nothing. "I must invent something," he thought, and suddenly his mind relaxed and he saw, printed on it like a photograph, the last page of the book. Then, with the speed and magic of a dream, each page appeared before him in perfect clarity until the first was reached, and he realised with overwhelming force that what he looked for was not there. In all that evil there was not one hint of good. And he felt, compulsively and with a kind of exaltation, that unless he testified to this, the cause of goodness everywhere would be betrayed.

"There's nothing to be said for you!" he shouted. "Of all your dirty tricks this is the dirtiest! The very snow-flakes on you are turning black! How dare you ask me for a character? I've given you one already! God forbid that I should ever say a good word for you! I'd rather die!"

Stainsforth's one arm shot out. "Then die!" he said.

The police found Walter Streeter slumped across the dining-table. In view of what had happened previously, they did not exclude the possibility of foul play. But the pathologist could not state with certainty the cause of death. There was a clue, but it led nowhere. On the table and on the victim's clothes were flakes of melting snow. It had run down his neck, soaking his underclothes. It had even, in some way, got into his stomach and might have killed him for, on analysis, it was found to be poisonous. Perhaps he had taken his own life. But what the substance was, and where it came from, remained a mystery, for no snow was reported from any district on the day he died.

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Too much science fiction contends that we Earthlings could not cope efficiently with matter non-Terrestrial. Mr. Dewey takes the opposite view. He makes a solid argument for our capabilities with this reassuring story of a nicely ordinary couple and their very satisfactory handling of a strange bit of matter acquired in the Arizona desert. If the uses to which the McLoys put the — call it a crystal — were not precisely those intended by its creators, still, they recognized and utilized its possibilities, thus proving we're as ingenious as the next race!

The Tooth

by G. GORDON DEWEY

Today

"WITH THESE?" Raul Alvarez held up the two bandaged stumps where his hands had been — stumps ending halfway between wrist and elbow. "*These?* Surely you are —"

"Joking?" The nurse laughed a little tinkling laugh. It was what she was learning to expect. The shocked incredulity in the renowned pianist's voice echoed those who had preceded him to The Tooth.

"No, Señor Alvarez," she said, still with the laugh in her voice, as though she had her own amusing little secret. "It is not a joke. All the people who — live here — will be in the auditorium within the hour. You are scheduled to play a piano concert."

"But Señorita" — and again he held up the pitiful stumps where the famous hands had been — "you cannot but be joking — and a very poor joke, surely. With my own eyes I saw — my hands, lying there beneath the train, where I fell. I tried to pick them up . . ." His expressive Latin face contorted in pain at the recollection. Then, "Someone must notify the station. I was to broadcast at eight."

"Then you must not delay. Eight o'clock, in New York, is not far off." The girl's hand under his arm was persuasively gentle. "Come with me, Señor Alvarez," she said, softly, no laughter in her voice now. "You shall see. Within the hour you'll play as you've never played before. With your own hands!" She added, reassuringly, "The radio station is standing by, in New York, and your broadcast will be on schedule."

They went down the corridor and an elevator took them to a lower floor.

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At the end of a short, straight hall a massive, vault-like door sighed open before them.

There was only one man in the room. He was white-coated, but with no smell of antiseptics about him. He looked up, smiled. "Over here, if you please," he said, and led the handless pianist to a small table in the center of the room. Seated snugly in a latticed metal framework on the table was an ovoid, unfaceted red crystal, held in an upright position.

Came the *snip snip* of scissors, and the doctor began to remove the bandages. Alvarez looked helplessly at the nurse as the red, raw stumps of his arms came into view, wincing when stuck gauze pulled loose from unhealed flesh.

The doctor tossed the bandages aside, smiled confidently. "Hold out your arms before you," he said, placing his hand on the musician's shoulder. "Look at them — concentrate! Visualize, see them as they were, with your own hands there, in all their strength and skill and supple dexterity. Just so!"

Alvarez raised awed eyes to the nurse. Her tinkling laugh rang out again.

"You are due in the auditorium, Señor Alvarez," she said. "I'll show you where it is."

Yesterday

Screaming through the tortured stratosphere, the multiple-rocket-driven ship melted the miles between it and The Tooth. For Brand McClain, seated at the controls, it was the first trip. He glanced aside at veteran pilot Rodney Grace, making his last haul on a Savior Ship. Too old — he was 28. Still okay for rocket drives, but only younger men were allowed to pilot a ship into The Tooth.

"Do you always notch them to the limit and hold it there?" McClain asked, indicating a dial on the low panel before him. "Forty-five hundred MPH — I've ridden some rocket blasts, but this . . ."

Grace grunted. "When we carry cargo, we pick 'em up and lay 'em down." He squinted into the rosy dusk of the western sky before them. " 'Djever see the sun come up in the west?"

McClain grinned. "No, but I've seen it set in the east."

"Same thing," growled Grace.

McClain nodded down toward the nose of the ship. "Who we bringin' in?"

"Some musician. Fellow name of Alvarez. Slipped and fell, in the station, just in time for a train to come along and take off his hands."

"I've heard the guy play — one of the best. Too bad. . . ."

Grace cocked an eyebrow at the younger man. "Save the tears," he grunted. "Don't tell me you never heard about The Tooth!"

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McClain had heard. But only the general things. He knew that The Tooth is a great ovoid building, 1000 feet high, 700 feet through, set down in the middle of a barren Arizona desert. Designed for living, it was planned so that as many people as possible might fit into a given space, have room to live and work, and enjoy the sun from its setback terraces and roof gardens.

It is a city in itself, self-supporting, self-providing. The nearest house is ten miles distant, the nearest town, fifteen. Power plant and other installations necessary to the operation of the building itself as a machine for living are in a great basement, below the floor of the desert, and outside what is regarded as the vital dimensions of the building.

In the exact geometric center of the functional part of The Tooth is a small room, windowless, and with only a single entrance, a heavy laminated-steel door, which is merely an extension of its thick, tough, armor-plate walls. In the center of this room is a table. On the center of the table is a firmly-anchored little framework in which rests a curious red crystalline ovoid. . . .

A famous painter works there in The Tooth, living there, doing his canvasses with eyes guiding hands that form the compositions with the sheer perfection of color values for which he is world-renowned. With his paintings again flowing out to the world, few people remember, and then only vaguely, the story of the tragic accident that cost him both his eyes.

And the greatest of all mathematical philosophers is there, still thinking in dimensions and time streams and equations beyond the comprehension of ordinary men. There is not even a scar to mark the spot where the falling roof tile crashed into the frontal lobes of his brain, turning him from savant to idiot.

There are others. Not many, yet — but they come. Two things are required of prospective patient-inhabitants. Their work must have been beneficial to the world, so that without them people are deprived of something. And they must have lost parts, or the use of parts, of their body which are vital to their work. An artist without eyes to see or hands to guide the brush is welcome; but an artist who has lost a leg cannot gain admittance.

The Tooth? Only two people, so it went, know why it is called that. And they aren't particularly communicative on the subject.

Against the golden glowing sky reared up a huge black egg, growing, growing. . . .

"Where do we land?" McClain reached for the throttle to reduce speed.

"Aim dead on that bright spot in the center of the building! The drive will cut automatically."

"What kind of field is it?" asked the younger man as he cut the throttle.

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"Wait'll we land. You've never seen anything like it. Near as I can figure it, they got this landing tube built right in to the center of the building. Just ease right into it. Make a routine landing."

The ship slanted slowly to the ground, McClain cut in the auxiliaries and at the end of the field the ship rolled toward a black mouth of a tunnel. As they entered, the tube lit up, Grace braked to a stop before a white wall. Before they were out of their seats a door opened in the wall and white-coated attendants were reaching for the rubber-wheeled stretcher carrying the still form of Raul Alvarez and rolling it smoothly forward to the brilliantly lighted room beyond the door.

Last Week

The ship news reporter went over the passenger list again; then tipping his hat farther back on his head he lit a cigarette and stared accusingly at the purser. The purser shrugged, spread his hands in mute denial.

"Look," the reporter said. "Look, now. They gotta be on this ship. You sure you don't know about them? Under another name maybe?"

"Five times you've asked me that! There's nobody like them people on board. No Mr. and Mrs. Michael O'Loy have booked passage with us."

"I got it straight," the reporter said. "They're starting out for around the world today. This is the only ship heading out of New York harbor for a world cruise. . . ."

"Never heard of them."

"Sure you have. They're the restaurant people who made a fortune over night, then sold out. Then they turned up missing for a week, and next thing they were out in Arizona with 10,000 workmen putting up a big hospital in the desert."

"Oh, them."

Across the Hudson a small freighter was pulling out from a wharf at Weehauken. The harbor pilot was handling the ship in the river, grumpily complaining to the captain that he would have to get off at the Light, and let the ship go on to its warm Mediterranean ports, with "even passengers this time!"

"Sure," the captain agreed. "We've got one cabin for passengers, but we don't often get them. It's young Mike O'Loy and his pretty wife, heading out to see the world. Nice kids." He looked toward the rail.

Dusk was over the river and the sun had dipped behind the Palisades. The couple at the rail stood arm in arm, watching as the lights of the city became ever brighter and more numerous.

"You're right, honey," the man said. "This is the way to do it. We've

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made some money, enough to enjoy ourselves on. No use being greedy."

"We've done some good for the world, too, Mike — The Tooth. I'm sure we have. Maybe it will make up for some of the things we've done that weren't so good — if the score ever gets added up."

He held her closely and spoke reassuringly. "We weren't dishonest, Helen. Well, not exactly. I guess there's lots of people in the world would have done a lot worse than we did. . . . Let's forget it for awhile, though. This is our first honeymoon — remember?"

Helen squeezed his arm and her voice was round and firm again. "It's been like a honeymoon," she told him, "the whole two years of being married to you."

Three Months Ago

The seven came to the end of their inspection tour in the kitchen. There were mutterings among them as they looked around the room, but it was Carter who put it into words. Rubbing a moist fat palm over his bald head, he said, speaking in his shrill whine,

"It's not big enough! It couldn't be done, that's all. You can't cook for 1200 people in a place this size. Besides, where's the equipment?"

Saunders was looking around, as puzzled as the rest of them, but prepared to be on the defensive. "Look," he said, "you knew this. I told you before we went through with the deal. The O'Loys wouldn't sell the kitchen fixtures. They said they'd take what they wanted. Anything they left, we could have." He waved his arm in a circular gesture. "This is it."

"Sure," whined Carter. "Sure. But like I say, it's just not big enough. Besides, where *was* the equipment?" He waved a pudgy hand. "They got a refrigerator here, and a big oven, sure; and a big mixing machine. But where's all the rest of the stuff? They used gas plates, maybe?"

The other men looked around the bare walls with trained eyes. Kitchen equipment that was used for a while left traces of where it had been, even after it was moved. They were all convinced that there had never been any other things in that kitchen except what was here right now. Maybe you could make a few cakes with this stuff, but how could you serve 1200 people from here? The answer was easy: It couldn't be done. But the O'Loys had done it. . . .

"Look," said Saunders. "We're all right. We'll come out all right. We'll make this kitchen larger, add a pantry. We got a nice building and we got the name. The Magic Kitchen is known all over the country now. We'll run this as a syndicate, like we planned, and each keep up his own restaurant on his own."

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"We sure paid plenty for this!"

"Okay! We paid plenty. So the kitchen's screwy. We were lucky they'd sell, that's all. That kind of competition was murder!"

Four Months Ago

It had been touch and go on the kitchen equipment for awhile. The restaurant itself was all right — Saunders could see at a glance that the furnishings were in good shape. He couldn't get over the feeling, though, that there was more here than met the eye. He turned purposively toward the kitchen.

"Mind if I take a look?" he said.

"It doesn't matter," Mike O'Loy insisted, stepping quickly in front of him. "I told you we're not selling the kitchen fixtures. The price is for the rest of the place — and any stuff we feel like leaving behind."

"That don't make sense, O'Loy," Saunders countered. "Like I say, the sales contract has gotta say you stay out of the food business for the next seven years. What good will the stuff be to you?"

Helen spoke up then. "Call it sentiment, Mr. Saunders. Perhaps we want to furnish our own kitchen with the things from here."

Saunders shook his head. "A private house with enough cooking stuff for more than 1000 people?"

Mike shrugged. "That's the way it is, Saunders."

Saunders stood staring at the O'Loys blocking his way to the kitchen. Something sure must be funny in there. He'd like to put over a bluff.

He didn't quite have the nerve. He couldn't go back to the others and tell them he'd let the deal blow up. Besides, he was in the same spot as the rest of them, with his back already to the wall. He couldn't keep on cutting prices to meet Magic Kitchen prices — that kind of competition was ruinous. He was losing business, too; would go on losing business.

The price was steep, but he knew the others would back him up. They had no choice. "Okay," he sighed in capitulation. "It's a deal. I'll have my lawyer draw up the papers first thing in the morning."

Mike held the sigh of relief until Saunders was gone. Then he began breathing deeply again and watched Helen uncross two painfully laced fingers.

"That's it, Helen. That's it!"

"Yes, Mike. . . . Mike —"

"No, Helen. They're getting what they're paying for. No more, no less. It's up to them to make a go of it. Maybe Saunders is suspicious, but all the second guessing in the world won't get them anywhere."

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Six Months Ago

"I never thought I'd wait in line to eat at *any* restaurant," the woman complained. "Why, there must be 500 people still ahead of us!"

"Now, Martha," her husband said soothingly, "the line's moving right along. We'll be in before you know it."

"If it wasn't that everybody was talking about the O'Loys and their wonderful new restaurant, and all, *I* wouldn't be here, I'll tell you!"

The line moved smoothly on, and before long Martha and her patient husband stepped through the doors of the Magic Kitchen. Then Martha forgot her recent annoyance.

It was a huge place, seating at least 1200 people at a time, high-ceilinged, clean looking, well lighted. There was the smell of good food in the air, and there was a look of cozy satisfaction on the faces of those who were leaving, their meals eaten.

As they moved on toward the ordering desk, Martha was struck by the look of keen anticipation on the face of the old gentleman, white of hair and neatly-trimmed beard, who preceded them.

"It was many years ago," he said, musingly, to the pleasant, smiling young woman behind the desk, "when last I dined. . . . It is said that one may order what one desires?"

"That is correct."

His eyes closed, and the look of anticipation dissolved into one of sheer ecstasy. "I had not dared to dream," he whispered. And then he began to order.

Martha tried to follow it — he spoke slowly, savoring each dish as he named it — but none of them sounded like anything she'd ever heard of before.

". . . *huîtres sur coquilles de Neptune* . . . *consommé aux œufs de Leda* . . . *perche à la Méduse Divine* . . . *filet de bœuf à l'Hercule Antique* . . ."

And there was more, much more. He mentioned wines and cordials with the very flavor of antiquity in their names, and there was an overtone almost of reverence in his voice as he named them: ". . . Amontillado '57 . . . Rüdesheimer Berg . . . Château Yquem . . . Chablis Vieux . . ."

And now the smiling young woman had turned to them, her pencil poised expectantly.

"May I have your orders, please?"

"We haven't seen a menu yet," Martha reminded her sharply.

The young woman continued to smile. "No menus, Madam. Just order whatever you desire."

"How do we know what they cost?"

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"One dollar a person, Madam, regardless of what you have."

For once in her life Martha felt inadequate as she ordered, ransacking her memory for favorite dishes. Sea food cocktail. Tomato juice. Avocado and fruit salad. Pheasant and bacon. Mashed potatoes. Green peas. Cold lobster on the side. Baked Alaska. Coffee. Cordial.

The young woman added the husband's order for bear steak and French fries, collected their money, and gave them their table assignment. They were scarcely seated when a waiter appeared with silverware and water, platters heaped with butter, and a huge covered dish.

When he had gone Martha lifted the lid gingerly. "Biscuits!" she snorted. "Well, I don't intend to fill up on biscuits!"

Her husband was hungrier. He broke one open, filled it with butter, popped it absent-mindedly into his mouth. He bit down, looked puzzled, and then his tired face beamed in delight. He started buttering another while Martha watched him suspiciously.

"Try one, Martha. You've never tasted . . ." Whatever he had planned to say was cut off as he began the second biscuit.

"Better than mine?" Martha's tone and expression were challenging.

"Try one!"

"Well, all right — but I'm not going to let them spoil my dinner."

A few minutes later the waiter returned with their dinners, removed the empty biscuit dish, and put their food before them.

It was just as they had ordered: good solid food. Nothing fancy about it, but superbly prepared. Its savory odors made Martha's mouth water. And as she finished one course of her meal, the empty dishes were removed and the next one, with silently swift efficiency, was served. The freshness of it would have challenged her in her own home. Incredibly, she realized, the chef must be timing thousands of different dishes so that they were being placed before hundreds of diners at the exact moment that both diner and food were ready.

"It's impossible!" Martha told her husband on the way out. "Edward, I know something about preparing food, as you well know. That meal was absolutely wonderful. But do you realize we got it only a few minutes after we ordered it? It just isn't possible."

"Volume does it, Martha. Big turnover."

"Maybe. But I still don't see how they could possibly have ready to serve anything a body could ask for. Anyway, we're going to eat here again."

"Even if we have to stand in line?"

"It didn't hurt you, Edward."

They were outside now, on the sidewalk, strolling along, sluggish, feeling the heaviness of their dinners.

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Then, suddenly, the sensation of being stuffed was gone. There was only the feeling of having had a delicious dinner, one that left them with a pleasant warming glow.

"The food wasn't heavy, either, Edward. I feel very comfortable. . . . We'll eat here again tomorrow night — if we come earlier maybe we won't have to stand in line so long."

Nine Months Ago

"It must be good for something, Helen." Mike O'Loy was arguing with himself as much as with his wife. "The wonder of the age. Or of all history, or something. Lord, if we can't make something out of this we're awful chumps."

"Like what, Mike?" The fond smile on his wife's face put him somehow on the defensive. He knew what she was thinking — that sure, Mike would want to make something of it. That it was only a toy, really, but Mike had to have his technicolor dreams.

Mike ran fingers through tousled hair and shook his head. "I don't know. It's driving me nuts. There must be something — there has to be!"

"You've thought of almost everything, darling. None of the ideas would work out."

Mike shook his head stubbornly. "All my life I've just missed, all along the line. Maybe it's me . . . maybe it's just the breaks. I have a good job in California, so we get married three weeks ago. Next day, no job.

"So we head back to New York to live in your brother's house while he's in South America. I get a job here right away. Everything looks fine. Then *that* job blows up. Everything blows up. And here we are with *this*, and there's a fortune in it somewhere, and I can't figure it out. Now *I'm* ready to blow up!"

"Mike, get me a glass of lemonade, please."

"Hunh? Sure." Mike quit pacing the floor and went over to the table in the center of the room.

The table was empty except for a small square of black felt. Lying on the felt was a small red ovoid. Mike stared at it wonderingly. It was almost like a ruby to the eyes, and you could look far into the depths of it, as though gazing into unthinkable distance. But the feel of it was that of hard metal, cold; colder than it should be, and as unyielding.

With a start he recalled the lemonade, concentrated on the mental image of it. A tall glass of lemonade appeared on the table beside the felt pad. He picked it up and handed it to Helen, feeling the coldness of it as he did so. Ice tinkled against the sides of the glass.

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Smiling, Helen accepted the lemonade. "It's wonderful just this way, Mike. We can have anything we want, when we want it."

"Within reason, I guess. . . . We could open a lemonade stand, and — Helen! Why not a restaurant? We could serve anything in the world, on a moment's notice."

Helen shook her head reprovingly. "Not that, Mike. If you're going to feed people, you've got to feed them. Not just give them something that's good to taste, like cotton candy."

"Yeah, I suppose so." Mike stared absently at his right hand, still damp from the frostiness of the glass. He started to rub his hand against his shirt to dry it.

"Mike, your finger!"

"Hey?" He glanced up quickly. Eyes sparkling, Helen was pointing to his little finger, the one with the missing first joint.

"See if The Tooth will replace your finger!"

"Aw, it wouldn't . . ."

"Try it!"

The excited urgency in Helen's voice was contagious. Mike walked back to the table and put his hand down beside the red stone, staring fixedly at the place where the rest of the finger should be.

When he held up his hand again the finger was whole, bending as he wished it to bend, behaving as a normal finger should behave. There was no line nor trace to show the juncture of old with new. He pinched the brand new tip, experimentally, then grimaced. "It hurts," he said. "Hurts just like the real thing."

"That's something we'll keep in mind. Maybe there's a use . . ."

"I got it!" Grasping his wife's shoulders, Mike shook her excitedly. "I got it! I got it!"

"Unhand me, gorilla. Got what?"

"Look, darling! You can make the best biscuits in the whole wide world. Can you make them even better? Lots of them? Thousands of them? Millions? Zillions?"

"Slow down, bub — you're racing your motor. Why?"

"If you can, we're in! Could you chonk them full of vitamins and iron and hormones and amino acids and all those things? So they'd be nutritious and still delicious?"

"Yes . . . I suppose so. I guess I could."

"We'll open a restaurant. We'll start out with a small place, then grow."

"Mike —"

"It's all right. We'll let the customers order anything they want. Give them biscuits while they're waiting. Biscuits they won't be able to resist

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eating. They'll be filling, and provide all the nourishment a person needs. The biscuits alone will be worth what we charge for the rest of the meal."

"I don't know. It doesn't seem — I hope you're right. . . ."

Ten Months Ago

It had been easy to get a job, easier to lose it. Just in from California, they were settled, for awhile, in Helen's brother's house. Mike had felt like tackling the world again.

But that Saturday afternoon he took his time getting home from work. It wouldn't be fun telling Helen.

Not that it was his fault. A slump in business, and the newest employees got the ax.

Helen was in the back of the house when he came in. Mike could hear her singing — that made it worse. He decided to shower and shave and change his clothes before telling her. Maybe he'd feel more like facing her then.

In the bedroom he stopped in amazement, looking at the bed. Then he walked over to it slowly, telling himself he was seeing things.

It was a new suit — powder-blue gabardine and double-breasted, exactly as he'd been wanting. He held it up, figured it would fit him well enough despite the somewhat unusual cut, then replaced it carefully on the bed.

And new shoes, the kind he always wore. A new hat. New underclothing. Shirt and socks and tie. Even suspenders — and a finely-made wallet with a crisp new $10 bill in it!

He picked up the wrist watch reverently. The band was of flexible gold links. The dial was large and golden-black, with lots of luminous figures and hands.

He held himself back with an effort. He wouldn't rush downstairs yet. He wouldn't ask who had left her a million dollars. He'd shave with the new electric razor, take a shower, dress in the new clothes, then go downstairs casually, pausing perhaps to light a cigarette with the new lighter. As though it were nothing at all. Cool and calm. Collected.

He was half shaved when he hit the bottom of the stairs, yelling her name! Helen appeared from the kitchen, looking very innocent, valiantly smothering a grin.

"Kiss me!" he shouted. "Tell me! What happened? Who died? Tell me quick!"

Helen exploded into laughter. Words finally came through, as she wiped tears from her eyes. "I wanted to see if it would polish —"

Mike sputtered. "What would polish?"

"Oh. The Tooth. I had it out today —"

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"Tooth?" Mike stared in astonishment. "What tooth?"

"I'm trying to tell you. Remember when you were a kid? — and a tooth came out, and you put it under your pillow, and next morning you'd find a . . ."

"Dime! Sure. What tooth?"

"That little red ruby oval thing we found in the desert, on the way from the Coast."

"What? Oh, that! . . . But —"

"Mike darling, listen! I was polishing it and thinking about that wrist watch you wanted so badly — and there it was!"

"This watch? Where?"

"Right there on the table, silly. Then I wished for some more things, and there they were! Right beside the Tooth. I mean, that red crystal. Then I found out I didn't have to rub it. Just make a wish for something and there it was. Like Aladdin's Lamp, only no hard rubbing, no scrubbing, no dishpan hands, no smoky giant."

Mike reached for the crystal ovoid. "Let me try that thing," he growled.

It was just like Helen said. Wish for a thing, and there it was, as perfect and solid as could be. Before he was thoroughly convinced that there seemed to be no limit to what the crystal could provide, the floor was covered with the fruits of his desires.

"This is better than an inheritance," he exulted. "Let's whip out some more of those $10 bills and go out for the evening."

"No, Mike. That would be counterfeiting."

"But you —"

"No. That's a real one in your wallet. Our last one. It wouldn't be right to *make* money."

"Guess not. Helen, I don't mind telling you now, I'm out of work again."

She didn't mind much, still too excited over her discoveries. "It's okay, Mike. Let's get dressed and go out to dinner."

"New clothes for you, too?"

"No, I don't think so. Just you. I'll wear that blue dress — I've never had it on, and I got it to celebrate in."

"Okay, baby. Let's get going."

Sure, he felt like a new man when they left the house a little later. New clothes, new confidence, and a pretty young wife on his arm.

They decided to walk, leaving the car in the garage. It was a velvety evening, and walking felt good. They'd have a good dinner, take in a show, then come back to their Tooth which Helen had tucked under the pillow of their bed, and see if they could figure out a use for it.

They were a little over 300 feet from the house when Mike felt the full

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chill of the evening. It hadn't seemed that cool when they started. And the sidewalk was suddenly cold, as though he were barefoot. He clutched at something fluttering before him, caught it, and stared at a $10 bill.

"Now it's raining money," he muttered. He heard Helen gasp beside him — and was suddenly conscious of his nudity!

He stood there for an instant, looking down at his bare skin. Everything was gone! Everything but the $10 bill he'd plucked out of the air.

The little neighborhood grocery was closed for the evening. Mike ducked into its doorway. He stood there, feeling the perspiration break out on him. Fortunately it was dark in the store, reasonably dark in the entrance.

Helen came in after him, removing her coat and holding it out to him. He slipped it over his bare shoulders gratefully, thankful for some covering.

"I'll go get the car and pick you up," Helen said, as she turned and hurried away. Mike started to call her back. After all, there was nothing for her to be crying about. Then he recognized the sounds she was making, and he felt his face flaming in the darkness. There was nothing to be laughing about, either.

Back at the house Mike dressed in his own more worn clothes. His face was grim as he picked up a handful of his wish-products of earlier in the evening and carried them from the house.

Helen was waiting on the porch when he returned, empty-handed. He loaded up again and set out in the other direction. Again he returned empty-handed.

Then he sat on the couch and stared at the ceiling. Helen came over and held his hand, resting her head against his shoulder.

At last Mike sighed. "It's a good trick, honey," he said. "While it lasts. But once I get about 300 feet or so away from the house — Foop! Everything your Tooth makes just turns into thin air. . . . *Very* thin air!"

Eleven Months Ago

It was somewhere in Arizona. Before they left California they counted their money, made sure they had enough for gas and oil and possible car repairs. Then they bought food enough to see them across the country. They would have to sleep in the car to meet their budget.

On all sides of them, to the horizon and beyond, was nothing but desert — and here they had their first flat tire. It was a warm day, hot enough, but not too hot. While Mike tackled the job of changing tires Helen set out to explore the near vicinity.

The tire was almost changed when Mike heard her call, "Mike! Oh, Mike!"

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Alarmed by something in the sound of her voice, a sort of frightened urgency, Mike dropped his tools and sprinted. He found her on the other side of the car, twenty yards from the road, staring at a group of rabbits.

Or something like rabbits — they weren't *right* rabbits. There was something wrong, something distorted about them. They were big in front, tapering toward the back, as though they, and not the viewer, had perspective. Built-in perspective! Their legs were shorter than those on the rabbits he remembered seeing, and they were fatter and plumper than wild rabbits had a right to be. And all of them were converging slowly toward . . .

He forgot the rabbits when he saw the snake! He'd always thought of rattlesnakes as thin, vicious strings of lightning. This one was almost a parody of a rattlesnake. Everything about it suggested laziness, good humor, and good living. It was fat, even without the bulge of the rabbit in its middle. It did not seem to want the rabbit that was moving slowly toward it, and its strike was sluggish and impotent.

"Don't move!" he commanded softly. "That fellow looks slow right now, but he can still move fast if he has to."

He went back to the car after the pistol he kept in the sidepocket, and only the back of his mind worried about the snake and the feeding system it seemed to have worked out with the rabbits.

The pistol bucked, and the snake's shattered head slumped limply to the sand. A few feet from its writhing coils Helen found the small egg-shaped crystal lying half-buried in the sand. She picked it up, admired the redness of it against the brown of her hand, then dropped it into her jacket pocket. It might not be anything valuable, but it was odd, and it was pretty.

Last Year

There had been a long silence between the two creatures. Neither of them seemed willing to bring the matter up again. At last the more sinuous of them spoke.

"We're beyond their asteroids now. You can cut in the interstellar drive."

His companion arched toward the control board, depressed still farther a sparkling pink concavity. Both felt the strain of the instant acceleration before the compensator could nullify it. Behind them the sun dwindled.

The speaker looked around the interior of the cabin, taking in the bareness of the place. "This is going to be a lonely trip," he complained.

"I agree, but don't try to shift the blame to me. You wanted to stop on Earth as much as I did."

"Perhaps I did. . . . We were fools. . . . We'll have to cover it, somehow, when we report the loss of the Provider."

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The smaller one twisted uneasily. "We'll have to think of something to account for the loss. . . . If They ever find out we stopped on a forbidden planet — !"

"It's not the first time we've broken a law."

"No. . . . And all for a breath of fresh air. I still don't see how we lost the Provider. We were remote from any intelligence. The Perceptor assured us of that."

"We were careless, setting the ship down on that desert. We took things for granted. Remember, we were there for almost a period, and the locks were open the full time. We relied on the intelligence Perceptor — possibly it does not work correctly on that planet. We should have kept watch."

"Perhaps so. Still — we were never far. How *could* the Provider have been taken and a worthless shiny pebble be left in its place?"

"Who knows, now? Perhaps there is good reason for Earth to be forbidden."

"Well, it will be a lonely trip!"

Anytime

A trade rat is a small, furtive, desert rodent notorious for its skillful filching of whatever tempts its fancy. Often it will leave in exchange some bauble which it regards as of equal value.

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This is not another adventure of Dr. Verner, although I can definitely promise you more of the good doctor's curious activities, but a reprinting — and first appearance before Fantasy *readers — of what is very likely to become one of Mr. Boucher's most popular stories.* — J. F. McC.

Nine-Finger Jack

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

JOHN SMITH is an unexciting name to possess, and there was of course no way for him to know until the end of his career that he would be forever famous among connoisseurs of murder as Nine-finger Jack. But he did not mind the drabness of Smith; he felt that what was good enough for the great George Joseph was good enough for him.

Not only did John Smith happily share his surname with George Joseph; he was proud to follow the celebrated G.J. in profession and even in method. For an attractive and plausible man of a certain age, there are few more satisfactory sources of income than frequent and systematic widowerhood; and of all the practitioners who have acted upon this practical principle, none have improved upon George Joseph Smith's sensible and unpatented Brides-in-the-Bath method.

John Smith's marriage to his ninth bride, Hester Pringle, took place on the morning of May 31. On the evening of May 31 John Smith, having spent much of the afternoon pointing out to friends how much the wedding had excited Hester and how much he feared the effect on her notoriously weak heart, entered the bathroom and, with the careless ease of the practiced professional, employed five of his fingers to seize Hester's ankles and jerk her legs out of the tub while with the other five fingers he gently pressed her face just below water level.

So far all had proceeded in the conventional manner of any other wedding night; but the ensuing departure from ritual was such as to upset even John Smith's professional bathside manner. The moment Hester's face and neck were submerged below water, she opened her gills.

In his amazement, John released his grasp upon both ends of his bride. Her legs descended into the water and her face rose above it. As she passed from the element of water to air, her gills closed and her mouth opened.

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"I suppose," she observed, "that in the intimacy of a long marriage you would eventually have discovered in any case that I am a Venusian. It is perhaps as well that the knowledge came early, so that we may lay a solid basis for understanding."

"Do you mean," John asked, for he was a precise man, "that you are a native of the planet Venus?"

"I do," she said. "You would be astonished to know how many of us there are already among you."

"I am sufficiently astonished," said John, "to learn of one. Would you mind convincing me that I did indeed see what I thought I saw?"

Obligingly, Hester lowered her head beneath the water. Her gills opened and her breath bubbled merrily. "The nature of our planet," she explained when she emerged, "has bred as its dominant race our species of amphibian mammals, in all other respects superficially identical with *homo sapiens.* You will find it all but impossible to recognize any of us, save perhaps by noticing those who, to avoid accidental opening of the gills, refuse to swim. Such concealment will of course be unnecessary soon when we take over complete control of your planet."

"And what do you propose to do with the race that already controls it?"

"Kill most of them, I suppose," said Hester; "and might I trouble you for that towel?"

"That," pronounced John, with any hand-craftsman's abhorrence of mass production, "is monstrous. I see my duty to my race: I must reveal all."

"I am afraid," Hester observed as she dried herself, "that you will not. In the first place, no one will believe you. In the second place, I shall then be forced to present to the authorities the complete dossier which I have gathered on the cumulatively interesting deaths of your first eight wives, together with my direct evidence as to your attempt this evening."

John Smith, being a reasonable man, pressed the point no further. "In view of this attempt," he said, "I imagine you would like either a divorce or an annulment."

"Indeed I should not," said Hester. "There is no better cover for my activities than marriage to a member of the native race. In fact, should you so much as mention divorce again, I shall be forced to return to the topic of that dossier. And now, if you will hand me that robe, I intend to do a little telephoning. Some of my better-placed colleagues will need to know my new name and address."

As John Smith heard her ask the long-distance operator for Washington, D. C., he realized with regretful resignation that he would be forced to depart from the methods of the immortal George Joseph.

Through the failure of the knife, John Smith learned that Venusian blood

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has extraordinary quick-clotting powers and Venusian organs possess an amazingly rapid system of self-regeneration. And the bullet taught him a further peculiarity of the blood: that it dissolves lead — in fact thrives upon lead.

His skill as a cook was quite sufficient to disguise any of the commoner poisons from human taste; but the Venusian palate not only detected but relished most of them. Hester was particularly taken with his tomato aspic *à l'arsénique* and insisted on his preparing it in quantity for a dinner of her friends, along with his *sole amandine* to which the prussic acid lent so distinctively intensified a flavor and aroma.

While the faintest murmur of divorce, even after a year of marriage, evoked from Hester a frowning murmur of "dossier . . ." the attempts at murder seemed merely to amuse her; so that finally John Smith was driven to seek out Professor Gillingsworth at the State University, recognized as the ultimate authority (on this planet) on life on other planets.

The professor found the query of much theoretical interest. "From what we are able to hypothesize of the nature of Venusian organisms," he announced, "I can almost assure you of their destruction by the forced ingestion of the best Beluga caviar, in doses of no less than one-half pound per diem."

Three weeks of the suggested treatment found John Smith's bank account seriously depleted and his wife in perfect health.

"That dear Gilly!" she laughed one evening. "It was so nice of him to tell you how to kill me; it's the first time I've had enough caviar since I came to earth."

"You mean," John demanded, "that Professor Gillingsworth is. . . ."

She nodded.

"And all that money!" John protested. "You do not realize, Hester, how unjust you are. You have deprived me of my income and I have no other source."

"Dossier," said Hester through a mouthful of caviar.

America's greatest physiologist took an interest in John Smith's problem. "I should advise," he said, "the use of crystallized carbon placed directly in contact with the sensitive gill area."

"In other words, a diamond necklace?" John Smith asked. He seized a water carafe, hurled its contents at the physiologist's neck, and watched his gills open.

The next day John purchased a lapel flower through which water may be squirted — an article which he thenceforth found invaluable for purposes of identification.

The use of this flower proved to be a somewhat awkward method of

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starting a conversation and often led the conversation into unintended paths; but it did establish a certain clarity in relations.

It was after John had observed the opening of the gills of a leading criminal psychiatrist that he realized where he might find the people who could really help him.

From then on, whenever he could find time to be unobserved while Hester was engaged in her activities preparatory to world conquest, he visited insane asylums, announced that he was a free-lance feature writer, and asked if they had any inmates who believed that there were Venusians at large upon earth and planning to take it over.

In this manner he met many interesting and attractive people, all of whom wished him godspeed in his venture, but pointed out that they would hardly be where they were if all of their own plans for killing Venusians had not miscarried as hopelessly as his.

From one of these friends, who had learned more than most because his Venusian wife had made the error of falling in love with him (an error which led to her eventual removal from human society), John Smith ascertained that Venusians may indeed be harmed and even killed by many substances on their own planet, but seemingly by nothing on ours — though (his) wife had once dropped a hint that one thing alone on earth could prove fatal to the Venusian system.

At last John Smith visited an asylum whose director announced that they had an inmate who thought he *was* a Venusian.

When the director had left them, a squirt of the lapel flower verified the claimant's identity:

"I am a member of the Conciliationist Party," he explained, "the only member who has ever reached this earth. We believe that Earthmen and Venusians can live at peace as all men should, and I shall be glad to help you destroy all members of the opposition party.

"There is one substance on this earth which is deadly poison to any Venusian. Since in preparing and serving the dish best suited to its administration you must be careful to wear gloves, you should begin your campaign by wearing gloves at all meals . . ."

This mannerism Hester seemed willing to tolerate for the security afforded her by her marriage and even more particularly for the delights of John's skilled preparation of such dishes as spaghetti *all'aglio ed all'arsenico* which is so rarely to be had in the average restaurant.

Two weeks later John finally prepared the indicated dish: ox tail according to the richly imaginative recipe of Simon Templar, with a dash of deadly nightshade added to the other herbs specified by The Saint. Hester had praised the recipe, devoured two helpings, expressed some wonder as to the

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possibility of gills in its creator, whom she had never met, and was just nibbling at the smallest bones when, as the Conciliationist had foretold, she dropped dead.

Intent upon accomplishing his objective, John had forgotten the dossier, nor ever suspected that it was in the hands of a gilled lawyer who had instructions to pass it on in the event of Hester's death.

Even though that death was certified as natural, John rapidly found himself facing trial for murder, with seven other states vying for the privilege of the next opportunity should this trial fail to end in a conviction.

With no prospect in sight of a quiet resumption of his accustomed profession, John Smith bared his knowledge and acquired his immortal nickname. The result was a period of intense prosperity among manufacturers of squirting lapel flowers, bringing about the identification and exposure of the gilled masqueraders.

But inducing them, even by force, to ingest the substance poisonous to them was more difficult. The problem of supply and demand was an acute one, in view of the large number of the Venusians and the small proportion of members of the human race willing to perform the sacrifice made by Nine-finger Jack.

It was that great professional widower and amateur chef himself who solved the problem by proclaiming in his death cell his intention to bequeath his body to the eradication of Venusians, thereby pursuing after death the race which had ruined his career.

The noteworthy proportion of human beings who promptly followed his example in their wills has assured us of permanent protection against future invasions, since so small a quantity of the poison is necessary in each individual case; after all, one finger sufficed for Hester.

Les chevaux dans le sky

Science fiction is starting to boom again in the land of Jules Verne, and the French presses are busily turning out both originals and translations — unfortunately largely on the lowest level. Which poses a problem for French critics, since their language has never developed any term equivalent to *space opera*. Igor B. Maslowski, the excellent reviewer for "Mystère-Magazine" (French edition of *EQMM*), is forced to describe novels of that type as "*l'anticipation scientifique genre* western."

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Here's a story of the future, and of today. Richard Ashby's little instrument to control teleportation may not be invented for some decades; the rotten political set-up he describes is, sad to say, a common contemporary phenomenon, not limited to any particular region of this country. Oddly, Mr. Ashby has many experiences in common with your editors; he has been frustrated in amateur dramatics, he has been both an announcer and writer in radio, and, to judge from this report, has had some experience in practical politics. So, we are doubly delighted with this story. It's a good piece of science fiction. And we, too, have encountered certain "practical" politicians whose proper fate should have been that of the fat villain of this story, Mayor Carlo.

The Sling

by RICHARD ASHBY

DANIEL CRANE backed into the relative safety of a corner and forced himself to feel intent, resentful, and yet another attitude for which he had no name. He waited five seconds. Ten.

A small rock came into being next to the ceiling. It bounced twice on the old and splintered floor, rolled erratically a few feet, and came to rest only inches from the Geiger. Crane put off the feeling as one would doff a mask, and as the Geiger made no objection, he stooped and picked up the rock.

Candle light showed it to be like the others; baseball size, cold, smooth, entirely undistinguished. And it had appeared about where he'd estimated it would. Thoughtfully he lighted a cigarette.

Why should a dollar's worth of twisted alloy magnets, a coil of German silver wire — oddly wound — a few dry cells in series, a Holtz tube, plus a unique combination of emotions make him an apporter?

And why should the particular location of the solder-spattered, humming little gadget outside the abandoned house determine where the "manifestations" entered the room?

He exhaled a long plume of smoke, went on wondering.

He'd spent the spring term wondering, ever since his tinkering had ruined a colleague's telekinesis project. The regents didn't give a damn about what was being done up at Duke. Besides being "wasteful" of time,

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if not of equipment, there were those pious asses among the group who suspected such inquiry to be sacrilegious, and they'd informed Dr. Pritchard that if he did not come up with something impressive to show the trustees . . . well . . .

He didn't. He might have, however, if it hadn't been for Crane. Lee Pritchard had a young fellow, an M.A. working for his doctorate, who could throw a seven 45 times out of 50 . . . under the strict Rhine conditions, of course. He also had two girls, one a stunning little doll in the old "sugah-honey-y'all" tradition, who could each literally stop a clock — a delicate pendulum affair. These three were to have been his principals at the next and critical get-together of students, faculty, and Money.

And the day they got together, Daniel Crane splashed the last drops of solder on his gimmick, wired in five dry-cells, and forgetfully left it turned on when nothing happened. Nothing, that is, that effected the homing sense of pigeons, nor the unerring accuracy of bats in a wire-strung maze.

But it did raise hob with the M.A. and the two clock-stoppers. Their scores dropped lower than a tout's guesses. Even the E.S.P. card group blew up. And Lee Pritchard was shortly "advised" to concentrate on the more prosaic aspects of psychology.

That same evening a veritable shower of gravel had driven poor Adams, the M.A., from his attic room.

Pranksters were suspected.

It took Crane four days before he happened to associate his widget with the disastrous events. And being a middling-good scientist, if not the college's best instructor (Advanced Electronics, and Biology 2) he found it impossible to resist this tantalizing lure.

Item: As far as he knew, nothing "new" had that day transpired in or around the college except his jury-rigged little gadget.

Item: It created some sort of wave, possibly an amplified magnetic pulse, with God knew what riding it.

Item: Something, possibly an artifact wave, had seriously fiddled with the extraordinary talents of three S.Ps., and had managed to short the lesser abilities of twelve others.

Further investigation seemed warranted.

But since the discontinuation of the paranormal projects he could hardly manage to use Pritchard's three prodigies, nor did he like the idea of possibly subjecting poor Adams to more shocking rains of gravel — although that was a temptation. So instead, with that maddening blend of naïveté and logic that had cost him a wife and a job at Brookhaven, he hunted up the nearest haunted house.

And that, in the South's red dirt country, was not too hard a job.

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Seven miles from the college, out on the old Jessup road and past the estate which was said to have been the model for Margaret Mitchell's "Tara" was a cotton-blasted knoll. And on that diseased land, standing in the lee of a dying jack-pine grove, was the house spoken of in a report of the *American Psychical Journal;* an empty old hulk shunned by natives who neither knew nor cared that the *Journal's* findings had been salted with such words as "inconclusive," "disappointing," and "unsatisfactory."

Pritchard had put Dan onto it. "Now that you mention it," he had said, "I recall there being a dilly somewhere in this vicinity. If you'll mix me another drink I'll call the college library and have it located. Eight, ten years ago the family got out with many excursions and alarums. Made complaints about apports going bump in the night, although most people think they left because they couldn't make a go of the farming. Research people came down with bell, book, and candle." He snorted. "Found nothing, of course."

The night staff at the library dug the information from the microfiles in a couple of minutes. "Old Lassiter place," Pritchard said, putting down the phone. "And the somewhat sniggling librarian informed me there's a stack of news clippings on it in the bins." He eased his bulk back into the sofa and eyed his host sardonically. "So you want an isolated shack to run a few sonics in, huh? I'll bet! What's your real reason?"

Daniel Crane managed to put him off. The next day Pritchard received the nomination for Reform candidate in the coming mayoralty race and forthwith found no time to spare for anything but politics.

Putting out his cigarette, Dan took a last look about the ugly room, closed his notebook, and stuffed the Geiger into his pocket where it began to cluck softly in protest at the luminous dial on Dan's watch. By the candle's fluttering light he left the decaying house.

Outside, crickets cheered the balmy night and a sinking orange moon flooded the countryside with its lambent glow. After putting his things on the front seat of the car he went over to the "medium" — the circuit of coil, magnets, tube, and batteries mounted on a breadboard. Unscrewing the Holtz tube — as good a way of turning it off as any — he lugged the contraption back to the car and placed it gently in the trunk. This nocturnal junketing about the country was a nuisance, he mused, but for some reason he could cause and/or control apportings at no other spot than here. He intended to find out why.

Dan locked the trunk, went around and slid beneath the wheel. He poked the starter button, the motor turned and caught, and he moved off down the eroded red clay of the drive.

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A week after the happy turmoil of graduation, Lee Pritchard — embarrassed and a little angry — dropped in with a bottle of fine old Scotch. He came quickly to the point. "The bottle's a bribe, Dan. I want you to speak for me at a rally Friday. Tomorrow night. I know it's a bore and a bother — that's why I haven't asked anyone I like to do it, up to now. But at this late moment, someone has dropped out." He frowned, rubbed at his blue-shaven jowls. "Fact is, a lot of people are dropping out. I'm starting to wonder if Gil Carlo isn't the power behind the whole damn Reform party."

"Carlo? But he's your opposition."

"You know about as much of practical politics as I did a few short weeks ago. Lord, have I come of age!"

Dan eased the seal off the bottle with a thumbnail. He smiled with large unconscious sarcasm. "And what have you learned?"

The other sighed deeply, sat on the low footstool. "Nothing I hadn't heard of and read of. Nothing about humans I didn't already know. But it's the actual coming into contact with filth that makes the nostrils quiver."

"That reads 'humans are filthy.' " He poured into two shot glasses. "Doesn't sound much like you."

Pritchard glowered down between his knees at the worn carpet. "That isn't what I meant. Not precisely. But it almost serves to describe the campaign I've found myself in. Carlo is starting to play rough."

"That slob?" Dan laughed, passed the other his drink.

"I'm serious. He's made some nasty threats. Or rather, the Riders have. And they burnt a cross on my lawn, you know."

"I heard." Dan sipped the Scotch. "But I also heard that it was a Reform gag to swing sympathy your way."

Pritchard shook his head. "Nope, it's the Riders. Carlo is their boy. It's their money all the way."

"If you'd known that before would you have accepted the nomination?"

Pritchard shrugged. "I dunno. I'm no hero. I was flattered into it."

That wasn't true, Crane knew. The other, behind his façade of cynicism and easy superiority, had jumped at the chance of heading an honest and constructive administration, and at helping drive syndicated corruption from town. It had looked fairly simple — distinguished, popular, able professor should defeat incumbent, an obese, vulgar shyster. And such a defeat was necessary — the college would eventually be forced to close unless State money was forthcoming. The present city administration had plans for the college grounds and buildings. A division of "Southern Tracer & Chemical" liked the property.

The Reform group had talked fast and well, some sincerely.

And according to Pritchard, they now had their patsy. Himself.

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Dan broke the silence by turning on the record player. "Swan Lake" and Scotch cleared the air considerably. After that they went to work on Dan's speech.

But they needn't have bothered.

Friday afternoon at five someone called Daniel Crane and advised him to absent himself from the meeting on any pretext he chose. If he didn't, the Riders would find him and take him to a party in the woods. There they . . . Dan hung up on the threats.

At six he dressed and drove to the auditorium.

At seven he was introduced.

At three minutes past seven a disturbance broke out in the rear of the hall. Whistling and jeering filled the air, directed ostensibly at the rowdies, but effectively silencing Dan. Later when he simply turned up the amplifier and went on with his address, someone threw garbage down on him from the balcony. And as several supporters of the Reform party moved up the stairs they were met by an outnumbering crowd of imported toughs. The meeting turned into a bedlam; eventually there was fighting onstage. Just before he was knocked out by someone he never saw, Dan caught a glimpse of the sheriff. That worthy stood before the mike, grinning like a fool, holding his hands in the air as if in benediction, and saying, "Please, folks."

He came to in the men's washroom, vomited. *I'm no hero*, he thought.

Illness in the family called one student from Crane's summer class in biology, and another went fishing and neglected to return. This lowered the total number in his class to such a ridiculously low figure that the dean, for reasons of economy, talked the remainder into switching to other, more well-attended courses. Reluctantly, he allowed Dan to begin a summer vacation — unpaid, of course.

For a day the gangling professor wandered the town in uneasy joy at his release from teaching's tedium.

The next day, his 39th birthday, he spent alternately hating himself for not joining Pritchard's game little group of campaign workers, and feeling sorry for himself. His neck still ached from the rabbit punch received over a week ago. And his ex-wife, Christine, as cool and beautiful and bitchy as ever, sent him a "happy birthday" picture of herself with her sleekly prosperous new husband and their two-year old.

Had his budget allowed it he would have gotten tight. Instead he threw himself into a study of his "medium" and of the notes he'd collected relative to the apportings, and as the evening wore on work-as-anodyne gave way to the old familiar pleasure at rambling down a new and abstract trail.

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Around midnight, the pleasure gave way to surprise as a hitherto ignored twist in his math straightened out. Excitedly he rechecked his work. Neglected cigarettes burned themselves into fingers of ash as Crane perceived the outlines of the new concept. That strange "state of mind" which he had discovered by imagining himself a "sensitive," and which was obviously one of the requisites of apporting, resolved itself into a tidy syndrome, one which the famous Dr. Laurence described in his controversial paper, "Thesaurus Of Deepframe Attitudes," as ". . . intriguing, in that its sine wave, at extremely low nervous frequencies, becomes distorted, and its output power, instead of dropping off, increases tremendously." Dr. Laurence went on to state that such a distortion has been noticed when the subject is tested in proximity to a simple neural field, such as is artifically produced by a full-wave rectifier using type 16 Holtz tubes, or in any "emotion-stained" surroundings.

And an innocent footnote in Crane's copy of the report added that the particular syndrome is almost invariably discovered to be present in subjects with a Rhine "K" (telekenetic) rating of 5 and higher, and by most so-called mediums and sensitives.

Crane checked the old Holtz tube he was using. It was a type 16.

Adams, the dice genius, had a Rhine rating of K-10.

And Crane, as a matter of routine, had early detected a stronger than average neural field in the abandoned Lassiter house. A field of sufficient intensity to produce hackles on the neck of anyone of low order neuron integration.

This added up.

Carefully, he wove Laurence's tables of harmonics and their components into the Holtz effect. The results were highly informative. His breadboard "medium" turned out to have been all along an ultra high-frequency beam which excited certain peculiar conditions that always existed in nature . . . as a Rhine K-5 or higher could excite them. And he saw how to aim such a beam. Impossible, but apparently true, his math indicated it could be pinpointed by rigging into the circuit a pair of thyratrons, fired by a motor-driven sine-wave potentiometer, and by. . . .

Laboriously, he fought down his astonishment and excitement to again check his math. He had not been mistaken; it was all still indicated. The remainder of the pin-pointing was accomplished by . . . *the imagining mind*. Dr. Laurence's tables of thought-radiation patterns further proved it.

Crane collected cigarettes, lighter, and coat as in a daze.

He left the house without locking up and wandered the town, struggling to assimilate and to appreciate what he had discovered. Morning, cold and rain-threatened, found him in a truckers' cafe with the knowledge that he,

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Daniel Crane, understood the "phenomenon" of teleportation, and could — with plenty of hard work — duplicate it artificially by simply reversing the effect of his rig.

Sipping the scalding coffee, he allowed himself to dream what such an achievement would mean: Simple rigs, employing a fantastically low power input, could transmit freight almost instantaneously, with no receiver needed at the terminal end. And human freight? Rapidly Crane considered Inertia in the new light he had cast upon it.

Humans, too, he decided. His memory brought up the strange account of the Spanish girl, Maria Fernandez-Coronel, who in the 1600's had shuttled back and forth between Agreda, Spain, and an obscure Mexican pueblo, making the trip in seconds. Of Casper Hauser. Of the Mexican soldier who couldn't explain his overnight journey, 300 years ago, from Manila to Mexico City. And there were others.

Crane grinned wryly as he considered the traffic problems that could arise.

And what of military application?

The grin faded. He forgot his coffee.

He had created the perfect gun. Shovel in explosives, gas, germs . . . anything in at one end and suffering at the other. Fissionable material, too — he was reminded of the clod that had sailed in one night, hot with active potassium. He'd carried a counter after that.

Yessirree! Daniel Crane, a real Vip. Rich. Powerful.

Maybe he could endow the Crane Peace Prize. A few hundred grand each year to the most pacifistic musicians, poets, and essayists. Assuming there would be anyone left around to either present or accept the award.

A gun any radio ham could assemble in his attic.

A gun which would run on flashlight batteries, and could be carried in a Ford or a Cub.

He left the bright bustle and warmth of the restaurant and headed home through the rain. He had much thinking to do.

That afternoon, weary but satisfied, he reached his decision. He fell asleep framing questions to put to the college calculator tomorrow, and noting that some issue of the magazine *Southern Homes & Gardens* should provide the other information he must have.

Gil Carlo waddled from the steamy Moorish splendor of his bath into the velvet luxury of his bedroom. A scent of sage-married-to-tweed floated in his wake. Life was good, he reflected, for one who knew the joy of contrasts. What was that word? Hedo-something. That's what he was. A hedonist. Just like in Hollywood or in ancient Rome. Better, even.

He wrapped himself in an orange Mandarin gown. Yes, better, for

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he doubted that many others would have so appreciated the nicer shades of contrast that they would allow themselves to become as sweaty and begrimed as he had today in the fields and filthy mills of his constituents, the better to enjoy the sybaritic evening which was to follow.

Carlo bared his yellow teeth to a mirror, scraped a morsel of cigar from a narrow incisor. This done, he crossed a white fur rug to his bed and began re-examining the day's photo haul. There were a score of nine-by-twelve glossies, each of himself in gaping faded galluses. The Honorable Gilbert Carlo, just a farm boy at heart, helping a gawking lad change a tractor tire. Carlo, the people's choice, in animated conversation with several flustered shanty women. Good 'Ole Gil, telling mill hands what fur. And several shots of the dynamic man of action, Gil Carlo, lower lip thrust pugnaciously toward an adoring crowd of croppers, thumping the fender of the sound wagon to drive home a point.

What had *that* particular point been, he wondered. Yeah! "These stuck-up perfessers an' their smart Doc Pritchard. Doctor of what? Wouldn't let him doctor mah dog!" Applause. Laughter. Cries of "You tell 'em, Gil." "Attaboy, Gil."

Scornfully, he threw the prints back on the bed.

They still fell for it. The same old line of ". . . gentleman farmer now, but gol-dang it all, I worked danged hard to get there . . ." Mention the "threat" of the North, the Red menace, the horrid International Banker . . . and you had the saps screamin' with joy or growlin' or lickin' your feet. Whatever you wanted.

A clock chimed 7:15 and shunted the train of his musings onto a new track. Dress now. See to the dinner. He hoped the Exalted Grand Master Rider liked chicken . . . not that the election wasn't already cinched.

As he finished dressing he heard a car roll up the graveled driveway. He hurried to the window, watched appreciatively as three young and lovely women stepped out. It was a difficult decision, but he chose the brunette for himself. Of course, if the Grand Rider wanted her . . .

He was hurriedly combing his hair when the first glob of mud splattered into the room. Black and viscous, it drenched a horrid patch near the center of the white rug. Carlo wheeled at the sound and spent the next minute frozen in grotesque stance, hands and comb to hair, gross body twisted, heart a-hammer with shock. Then, as nothing further happened, he began a stiff-legged circuit of the room, searching for the open door or window or grill through which the mud could have been thrown. And when he found no opening he fled into the hall and began yelling for the servants.

The dinner did not go too well. Several times the Grand Rider, in oily

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annoyance, was forced to repeat what he said in order that Carlo might make reply.

The next morning, Carlo let himself into his downtown law office, then halted in dread. The walls of the ostentatiously shabby little room were blotched with mud, some of it fresh and oozing slowly to the floor.

It was a sty; putrid and slimy.

He spent the day, brooding and uncertain, at his campaign headquarters.

That evening, mud found him as he bathed. Grabbing the revolver from the ledge of the tub, he fired wildly at the opposite wall. The plangent roar and echoing almost deafened him.

In town, scant minutes later, he proceeded to get swaggering drunk.

Sick with drink and fear, Carlo reported as ordered to the office of local High Rider. That man, slender and aloof, waved him into a chair. After brief amenities, he told His Honor that any further outbursts of foolishness might well cost them the election. "It may have escaped you, Carlo, but people are talking. And the Reform crowd is going to make hay of it. They're not fools, especially Pritchard. Your exhibition of last night has probably cost us the church vote. What the hell's the matter with you?"

The miserable fat man ached to explain. He couldn't. Who'd believe him?

Five days before the election, a jittering and red-eyed Gil Carlo moved into a downtown hotel — "To be closer to headquarters . . . and everything." And with the aid of much liquor he finally drifted into uneasy sleep.

His respite was short, however, for soon after midnight he was pummeled awake. Heavy gouts of mud were falling on him from the ceiling's horrible darkness. Screeching and brandishing his gun, he lurched into the corridor and made his way through the lobby into the street. There, a Negro paper boy attracted his panic and rage, and only the intervention of a furious crowd saved the lad from a severe beating.

"But, Dan, how do you account for it?" Pritchard asked. "I've been acquainted with Carlo for a long time. He's an astute businessman, sharp and unscrupulous. What the devil could have gotten into him?"

Crane shrugged. "Campaign jitters, maybe."

"Nonsense. He's gone through two other elections, far tougher ones than this, without even mussing his hair. Anyway, the Riders do all the work. All he has to do is charge about the countryside kissing and cussing. And he was a setup for the legislature. At least, Haley said so."

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"The Grand Rider? What truck you been having with him?"

"Big deal." Pritchard laughed. "He hunted me up last night. Offered to swing everything my way if I'd play ball."

Crane eyed him carefully. "What did you say, Lee?"

"That I honestly didn't think I needed Rider help, but thanks just the same, some other time, so sweet of them. And to scram."

"No bribe mentioned?"

The other shook his head. "He didn't have time to get around to that. I felt tired and tough. Showed him my muscles."

"What a starry-eyed little mayor we may have," Crane sighed. "You think you can win without their help?"

"If I can't make it without them I don't want it. Not even to keep the college afloat."

Dan stood to go for the coffee. "Tell you what, Lee . . . I haven't been much help to you, but I'll do what I can to see that word of Carlo's drunken flings gets around. That ought to hurt him a little."

"Don't. So I'm an idealist, Dan. It's a surprise even to me. But I want to play fair. No mudslinging. I'll make it without that."

For a moment they regarded each other. Then Crane smiled blandly and went for the coffee.

When he saw the last returns were in and watched the victory party get under way, Dan left the tele and attempted to phone Lee his congratulations. But the line to the Reform suite was jammed. The hotel operator begged his pardon in tired tones and requested that he call back in fifteen minutes.

He mixed a drink and returned to the tele.

An unseen announcer was padding for time with commentary. Rather poor commentary, Dan thought: ". . . came from behind to show the town and the nation that men can win by virtue of their virtue, by their inherent *right* to office, and . . ."

Groaning, Crane switched to another channel. Their view was about the same — excited throngs milling about the hastily decorated ballroom, chattering, gesturing, laughing. The scene panned down to pick up Lee Pritchard as he accepted a light from someone, shook hands with another, joked nervously. Beside Lee stood the man's young secretary, proud and gracious and thrilled.

A nice girl, Dan saw. Lee liked her too, would marry her some day.

He tasted his drink. A nice girl, utterly unlike Christine.

To shake off that thought he clicked the screen blank and roamed about the radio dial, half-listening, half-thinking.

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According to the narrator on the big "Parade Of History" show, the world still ". . . muttered ominously." Someone on the powerful New Orleans station claimed that the cold of the "cold war" was ". . . anesthetizing logic, and yet chilling man's hope of peace." Crane found that metaphor not to his liking and dialed away.

". . . and I and all the little people of the earth," some orator somewhere shouted, his politics-rich voice phlegmmy with distance and static, ". . . grasp the power that lies in your vote to turn these dawgs out of office and . . ."

Lee Pritchard was speaking as he returned to the television. ". . . thank each of you for the part he has played. The voters of this county . . ."

Crane blanked the screen, found some music.

After drinking thoughtfully for a while, he went into his study and looked over his notes covering the early apportings he'd observed and the first math analyses he'd tried. All this, along with his last paper work, he stuffed into a crucible and charred to powder.

No reports to any society.

No new toys for the war department. He thought of Brookhaven. There were enough weapons. Too many.

From a deep drawer he took out his revamped "medium" and examined it. His trained eye noted a superfluous loop here, a too-large coil there. It could be made much smaller, he realized. More compact. Pocket size, perhaps.

For a moment the old suspicion assailed him that he was playing God. He thought of Gil Carlo . . . what a headache his life had been lately. But then, if Carlo and the Riders had won, what a headache for Lee and the college and the South.

He turned the apparatus on and his doubts faded.

He knew with certainty what he had to do in the world.

"Man's hope," he mused aloud. "And all the little people . . . the voters . . . the power . . ."

And as he stood there he smiled, and an imp of inspiration struck him. So he found a bottle of 100 aspirin tablets. Opening the pages of the May 1942 issue of *Southern Homes & Gardens* to the display of the then-new home of Gilbert Carlo, he selected a shot of the lavish dressing room, with its white bear rug and huge satin-covered bed.

Carefully, he held the bottle over the gaping blankness of the sending ring. He fixed the picture of Carlo's bedroom in his mind and the aspirins vanished as he poured them.

A moment later he thoughtfully sent along a glass of water to wash them down.

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One of the outstanding fantasy novels of 1951 was Kem Bennett's THE FABULOUS WINK, *a book that brilliantly satirized the materialistic phonies of all religions. That perceptive novel solidly established the versatile Mr. Bennett as one of the ablest practitioners of contemporary fantasy. We say "versatile" for we learn he's a contributor to such widely variant markets as MGM and "The Saturday Evening Post." He also translates plays from the French! Here, published for the first time in America, is more of the Bennett imagination and humor — in top form with this description of what is surely the oddest medium of communication a ghost ever used.*

The Soothsayer

by KEM BENNETT

TOM WILLIAMS did not greatly mind being deaf. He had discovered that its disadvantages were balanced by advantages. Deafness gives a man a fine chance to have a quiet think now and again. It allows him not to listen to other people's opinions while he speaks his own. It gives him a great deal of amusement when people who think he is deafer than he is say things in front of him which he is not meant to hear. Also it is wonderful to be deaf when a man is angry. Each time he says: "Damn you, man, for a thief and an idler," all you have to do is to put your hand to your ear and smile at him and the anger sticks in his throat and gives him indigestion. However, these are philosophical conceptions and Eiddwyn Williams would never give her husband credit for being a philosopher.

"It is for nothing, man," she protested daily for more than six weeks. "It will not cost us a sixpence, and they say you will hear as well as ever with one of these instruments."

In the end Tom gave in because he knew Eiddwyn would never stop talking if he did not.

The doctor at the hospital pushed a little black plug into Tom's ear and said, "One — two — three," into the microphone. By this time Tom was tired of the poking and peering and banging of tuning forks and not in the mood to give the doctors any more help than they asked for. He just blinked and said nothing.

"ONE! TWO! THREE!" the doctor shouted. "CAN YOU HEAR ME?"

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Tom took the plug out of his ear and stared at it with great disgust. "By damn," he said. "I heard you the first time, doctor, but I'll not hear you again. You did blow my ear off nearly."

In its shiny black box with its spare batteries and accessories the instrument looked very expensive and important. On his way back home Tom carried it in much the same way as he carried the offertory plate in chapel on Sundays. In truth, he neither liked nor trusted the thing. If it was going to bellow in his ear like the Bull of Bashan each time he wore it, he would have no peace. Ignoring Eiddwyn's curiosity, he put it away in a drawer for a few days so that he should have time to think about it and to decide whether or not it was decent.

When eventually he decided to experiment — because it was a terrible waste to let it lie idle, as Eiddwyn pointed out — he took it out of the drawer with a suspicious reverence and went away to a field nearby, where he sat down under the hedge. After lighting his pipe and thinking for a while, he put the plug gingerly into his right ear and waited. A bird twittered nearby and he grinned in recognition of the pleasant noise. After that there was silence.

"Good day to you, Tom Williams," he said into the microphone.

"Good day to you, Tom Williams," said his own voice in his ear. Since he could hear his own voice quite well without an instrument at all, he was not impressed. There was nobody else to talk to, because the field was quite deserted.

Tom stared at the microphone on his lap. He had never believed it possible to get something for nothing and not even Nye Bevan was going to change his mind. He started to wonder where the catch could be.

"Supposing I was to break it," he said to himself suspiciously. "Would they have me pay for it now?"

Then a strange thing happened. "No, Tom," a voice said in his ear. "They cannot make you pay for it unless they can prove that you broke it on purpose."

Tom frowned. He stood up and peered over the hedge. Nobody. "Stop playing hide and seek, man," he said. "Where are you?"

"You would call it heaven," the voice answered.

Tom thought about this for a good while. Then he sat down again and took his pipe from his mouth. "What is it like up there, man?" he asked.

"It is anything you like to make it. I am sitting in a bar parlor with a pint at the moment."

"Goodness," said Tom, "and I thinking it was like a great chapel with all the people dressed in white. Are you an angel, man?"

"No, I am a ghost — or that is what you would call me."

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"Why should you be talking to me like this?"

"Because I am interested."

Tom nodded. "Indeed," he said. "So am I."

"With your permission, Tom," the voice continued, "I am going to make a prophet out of you — like one of the Bardic prophets who lived in Wales long ago."

"That is very generous of you, ghost bach."

"It is nothing to me, Tom. It is for you to decide. Do you want to be a prophet?"

"By damn, what a hard question for a man to decide in five minutes!"

"No hurry," said the ghost. "Take your time. And call me Ianto. It is more friendly."

For more than five minutes Tom thought very hard indeed. Then he said, "Ianto!"

"Yes, Tom?"

"You say you would make a prophet out of me, but will you not be the prophet and I only your voice?"

"Indeed that is right, but you will have the asking of the questions."

"Then I shall ask one now. Do I wish to be a prophet?"

"You do."

"Then it is settled. Why are we wasting time, man?"

"Did it work, Tom?" Eiddwyn asked when he got back.

"It is a very wonderful instrument."

"What did I tell you?"

Tom smiled at his wife. "We'll be rid of your mother in less than two years," he said and that caused a terrible argument. When the argument had died down, Tom sat down at the table and did his football pools.

"Twenty-two thousand pounds!" Edward Jones said a few days later, staring at the cheque in Tom's hand. "What are you going to do with it all?"

"I am going to buy you a beer, man. I am going to buy everybody a beer. . . . Mrs. Roberts, will you ask my friends what they are drinking, please?"

The Nag's Head was very full, as it had been for nights past. Everybody in Guilsfield was there and a great many strangers from Welshpool and Oswestry and Llanfair Caerinion as well. They all of them had pencils and pieces of paper in their hands, ready for the time when Tom might feel like prophesying. He did not start until ten o'clock. Then he gave them three good horses for the next day's racing — outsiders they were, not miserable favorites. Furthermore, he told a commercial traveler from Liverpool that his wife was making a fool of him with the milkman and would do so again

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the following Friday. The commercial traveler drove away in his car to see what he could save from the wreck.

As usual, everybody wanted Tom to tell them how it was done and for a long time he refused, but at ten to eleven, perhaps because he was pleased to have won the football pool or because he had had a number of Mrs. Roberts' best bitters, or perhaps again because he was tired of saying nothing and took pity on the crowd, he decided to tell them.

"It is a ghost who talks to me in my new instrument," he explained. "His name is Ianto and he is a great friend of mine. He has made me a prophet, like the Bardic prophets of long ago."

"Indeed to goodness," Edward Jones said with astonishment. "That is what I call a great friend. Will you not introduce him to me, Tom bach?"

Soon after that, Mrs. Roberts had to call for time — although it nearly broke her heart to do so — because Jones the police was in the crowd. Tom and Edward walked home together as was their habit. They were silent as they walked thinking their own thoughts and far away from one another.

Tom had discovered that he only had to think his questions and Ianto the ghost would answer them.

"If I go on giving the names of winners and filling in the football pools all correct, what will happen?" he wondered.

"The bookies will go out of business and so will the football pool promoters," Ianto answered.

"That was what I was thinking. Life would be very dull for the boys without a bet now and again. Also, Ianto, I am thinking that the £20,000 I have won has come from the pockets of many people like you and me — and they all sure they would have a chance of winning, which they have not while I am a prophet. It is not right."

"That is for you to decide, Tom."

"I have decided, man. I shall give no more winners." Tom sighed. "I shall be as popular as the foot and mouth hereabouts when I refuse to give winners, but that cannot be helped. It seems to me that being a prophet is a complicated business."

"It must be, Tom. I would not know. Being a ghost is very simple."

Tom was too concerned with his own problems to bother about the simplicity of being a ghost and he continued to turn them over in his mind. "If I am not to prophesy winners, what am I to prophesy then?" he asked himself. "Ianto bach, what would happen if I were to go to London and tell the political gentlemen what is going to take place in the future?"

"They would be very rude to you, Tom, for they hate to be contradicted."

Tom thought this was very likely and he decided that he would not go to

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London, but the problem of how to use the gift of prophecy still worried him and he walked on with his head bent, trying hard to find a solution.

Meanwhile Edward Jones had been thinking about Ianto the ghost and the three winners which Tom had given that evening. The three winners were all very well, but already the bookies in the neighborhood were very suspicious and the odds they gave to anyone betting in Guilsfield were as short as could be. It seemed a shame to Edward that Tom should be so generous with his prophesies. This thought gave place to another one and it was one of which Edward was very ashamed, but however ashamed he was it stuck in his mind.

When they were not far from Tom's house at a place on the road which was very deserted, the devil tempted Edward Jones so strongly that he could not resist. He picked a thick stick from the hedgebottom and hit Tom on the back of the head with it. Then he took his instrument and ran away, leaving Tom, who was his best friend, lying unconscious in the ditch.

The following morning the milk from the farms was not collected because Edward Jones had taken the Milk Marketing Board's lorry and driven away with it to a place in the North of England where a race meeting was being held. As soon as Edward arrived at a town near the course, he sold the lorry and, with more than £200 in his pocket, went racing.

In one of the expensive enclosures he found himself a deserted corner and fitted the plug of Tom Williams' instrument into his ear.

"Ianto the ghost," he said rather nervously. "Are you there?"

"I am, Edward Jones," Ianto answered coolly.

"A beautiful day it is for the racing."

"Not so bad."

"Er . . . Would you mind telling me what is to win the two o'clock?"

"Not at all, Edward Jones. It will be a horse called Guillotine."

"Guillotine!" Edward Jones wrote down the name on his paper. "Thank you, Ianto the ghost, you are a real friend to a man."

"Think nothing of it," said Ianto.

Well before two o'clock Edward Jones had £90 of stolen money on Guillotine to win and was sitting in a grand stand with a pair of hired binoculars. He was feeling ashamed of himself, but he argued with his conscience, pointing out that he would be sure to give Tom Williams half of his winnings and that he had only taken the instrument to protect Tom from himself — going around telling everybody winners was no way to make money.

At five minutes past two Edward Jones — who had a fine view of the course through his binoculars — watched Guillotine come in. The horse came in last by more than a furlong and it was obvious that it had broken his heart to run even as fast as that.

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Ianto the ghost was apologetic. "You must have misheard me," he said regretfully. "I said Galantine — the one that was out in front, remember?"

Edward Jones believed him. "What about the two-thirty?" he asked.

"Fairy Queen will win it."

"Fairy Queen?"

"Fairy Queen."

"Thank you, Ianto the ghost. This time I shall put on the rest of my money and win back the £90 I lost on Guillotine."

"Do that, Edward Jones," said Ianto the ghost.

The following morning, when Edward Jones had left him, a very sorrowful, guilty man, Tom Williams sat up in his hospital bed and put the little black plug of his instrument in his ear.

"Oh, Ianto," he said gloomily. "I have a great bump on the back of my head with a hole in the middle."

"I am very sorry to hear it, Tom."

"It was given to me by my best friend."

"I know that, Tom."

"And now he is too ashamed to talk to me and it will cost me £300 to buy back his lorry so that he shall not have to go to gaol. Could you not have taught him a less expensive lesson, man?"

"I did not know you were going to pay, Tom."

"I have £22,000 in the bank. What else could I do for a friend?" Ianto did not answer. "I am not enjoying being a prophet," Tom added. "It has lost me my best friend and it will force me to leave Guilsfield where I have lived all my life because the boys will never forgive me for not telling them any more winners. . . ."

"I knew you would not enjoy it, Tom."

"You know too much, Ianto."

"Yes, Tom."

"I expect you know that I am thinking that it is better to be the best deaf hedger in Montgomeryshire than a blinking prophet, man?"

"I do, Tom."

"Then you'll not be surprised to hear that I am going to break this instrument when we have finished talking and get the load of prophesy off my shoulders?"

"If I were you I should do the same thing."

Tom smiled and sighed with relief. He had not been at all sure that Ianto would consent to his resigning as a prophet and it was good to know that he would. "So be it, Ianto," he said happily. "Do not think that I am angry with you, man. You have been a good friend and it is sorry I am to break off the friendship."

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"So am I sorry, Tom, but there it is. Is there anything you would like to know before we part?"

Tom considered for a while. "I do not think so, Ianto. . . . Yet . . . Yes, I should like to know whether we shall ever meet again for I do not like to think of losing a good friend for ever."

"We shall meet again, Tom," Ianto said cheerfully. "In seventeen years, four months, three hours and 27 minutes . . ."

"By damn man, not only do you know too much, but you talk too much as well," Tom Williams said angrily and, with that, he banged his instrument against the bedpost shattering it in his hands.

When the nurse came in to see what was the matter, she found him doing arithmetic on a piece of paper. It was a good thing for Tom Williams that he was a bit of a philosopher.

Coming . . . *in our next issue (on sale in mid-August):*

One of the most delightful discoveries we have yet made — *Day-Magic*, by Charlotte Armstrong, a short novel in which one of the finest contemporary writers of suspense-chillers (remember MISCHIEF and THE UNSUSPECTED?) reveals an astonishing understanding of how to write warmly humorous fantasy.

The issue will also contain a wide variety of science fiction short stories, including —

The Factitious Pentangle, by H. Nearing, Jr., in which Professors Ransom and MacTate become Martian marital counselors;

The Good Provider, by Marion Gross, a charming F&SF "first" which discloses a new use for time machines;

Stories by Alfred Coppel, Arthur Porges, Ralph Robin and others; and the highly welcome return of those absurdly entrancing creatures, Kenneth R. Deardorf's Ganymedes, with further scientific reports on their morphology and behavior.

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As author, publisher and anthologist, August Derleth is probably the foremost current American advocate and practitioner of the gruesomely gothic weird tale, the black nightmare of unspeakable terror. But Mr. Derleth, surely one of the most varied and versatile of all writers, is versatile even within the specialized domain of the weird. None of his other stories is quite like this one: a theme which might easily have suggested a conventional charnel-horror treatment, but is here adroitly lifted to a new plane of suavely polished satire. We're very happy to welcome August Derleth back to the pages of F&SF with this unique comedy of vampiric manners.

"Who Shall I Say Is Calling?"

by AUGUST DERLETH

My sister saw the place first — one of those fine old houses, bought up by someone newly rich, and rehabilitated. It was set back a little way from the road, and now, in mid-evening, it was ablaze with lights.

"A party," she whispered. "A masquerade!"

We could see people in costume gliding back and forth across the windows.

"Let's crash it," she said.

I was game. "Who shall we be?"

She looked at me judiciously, her head cocked to one side, and her eyes shone, as always, in the darkness. "You could be the Admirable Crichton and I could go as I am for Lady Windermere."

She raced ahead of me and rang the bell.

The fellow who answered the door was in costume, too — Jeeves to the life. He was correct, austere, but with a twinkle. "Who shall I say is calling?" he asked.

"The Admirable Crichton," I said. "And Lady Windermere."

He chuckled admonitorily and shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "We already have an Admirable Crichton. The rule was no duplications."

Maryla snapped her fingers impatiently. "Make it Count and Lady Dracula," she said.

Jeeves made a low bow and swept us in.

Maryla put a hand on my arm and held me back until Jeeves caught up and led us to our host and hostess.

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"Robespierre and Madame de Maintenon," he said. "The Count and Lady Dracula."

"We are just in from Orleans," said Madame de Maintenon, acting her part. "And you?"

I hesitated. Was I now Crichton or Count Dracula, by Maryla's impetuous decision?

"From Castle Dracula, near Bistritz, Transylvania," said Maryla, making a curtsy.

They were trying to figure out who we were. They looked puzzled. I could see that we had a familiar appearance for them, particularly me. I turned to our hostess and offered her my arm.

"May I have the honor of this dance?" I asked.

She nodded, took my arm, and we swung away. Maryla fairly fell into Robespierre's arms, and away they went. We danced among other maskers, some with dominoes, some with false faces, some without anything but make-up. Frankenstein, Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, Peter the Hermit, Landru, Marie Antoinette, Carmen, the Admirable Crichton, Psmith, Major Barbara, Lord Jim, Captain Bligh, Pearl White, Cleopatra — they were all there. It was quite a party; evidently our host and hostess had wangled every worthwhile costume from the nearby city.

I caught Maryla's eye. She winked and ran her tongue quickly out over her lower lip.

"Who are you?" asked my partner at last.

"Is it fair to tell?" I asked. "I could have been the Admirable Crichton. But you have one. I could have passed for the Duke of Gloucester — without his medals and ribbons, of course — but that's a little prosaic. Dukes, you know. Aren't you traditional? Unmask at midnight."

She nodded. "Count Dracula," she mused. "You do remind me of Bela Lugosi. I know you. I've met you somewhere."

"I see you have Frankenstein and Boris Karloff. I'm in good company."

"Yes, and Dr. Fu Manchu, too." She looked at me closely through her domino. "I know I've seen you somewhere. Don't tell me. Let me guess. Was it on the stage? Were you in *Arsenic and Old Lace?*"

"No, and I'm not Monty Woolley, either," I said. "Though I confess I like to stay for dinner."

She laughed. She was not so young as I had thought at first. If you stay out of circulation long enough you find your judgment a little warped. But her make-up was heavy, very heavy. I wanted to dance with someone younger.

"How is it?" Maryla asked, when we got together after that first dance.

"It goes," I answered. "What about you?"

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"He bored me. A little fresh. Couldn't dance, either."

"Maybe you were the stiff one," I said. "After all . . ."

"Take a look at that boy over there," Maryla said.

I did. Apollo. "Watch yourself," I said.

She smiled and darted into the crowd, straight for Apollo. I gazed past Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty and picked out Cinderella. She looked good — flushed with youth and vibrant. She was pink and white and too pretty to hide it behind anything more than a domino on a stick, which she held up dowager-like as a lorgnette. Just at the moment she did not appear to be engaged. I walked over.

"May I?" I said, leering and showing my teeth. "Count Dracula, at your service."

She squealed and giggled. "My, what pointed teeth you have, Dracula!" she said.

"The better to bite you with, my dear," I answered.

She gave me her arm. "If you promise not to bite you may have this dance."

"I promise," I said. "It's too early, anyway. I've just had supper."

She laughed.

She danced well, but there was something about her that repelled me.

Maryla had had luck, too. "That was a good dance," she said. "Who are these people, anyway?"

"Don't ask me. Are you beginning to feel there's something queer here, too?"

"Yes, a tension or something."

"Sure, I noticed it right away."

Had I? I wondered. But it was there — a strange, intense sense of waiting, as if they all expected something to happen, or were waiting for someone who was late.

"Could it be that couple we met four or five miles down the road?" asked Maryla. "You did think they were oddly dressed."

"Of course," I said. "That's it. They were coming here. Reverend Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne. I knew they reminded me of someone."

"Car trouble," said Maryla.

"We won't say anything about it," I said. "There's something more. It makes me uneasy."

"Oh, we can't back out now," she cried.

"No. Just the same, they may suspect we're gate-crashers."

"They couldn't tell among all these people." She laughed. "Our host even thought I was wearing one of those new skintight rubber masks. I told him they didn't make them that close to the life."

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The orchestra struck up another number.

"What time is it?" asked Maryla.

"There's a clock over there. Almost eleven."

"We can dance some more."

I had the next dance with a little beauty, as light as a feather on her feet. It was a pleasure to dance with her, though I felt awkward. She seemed to know her way about, and she knew a great many people.

"I don't know you," she confessed.

"I don't even know who you're supposed to be," I said.

"I'm Bluebeard's tenth wife," she said.

That puzzled me for a moment. "Did he have ten?" I asked cautiously.

"No. That's just the point. Since he didn't have ten nobody could say just what she looked like, could he? So I'm safe."

I laughed.

She looked preoccupied, and kept gazing over my shoulder toward the door to the ballroom.

"Are they waiting for someone?" I asked.

"Oh, you noticed it, too," she said.

"It's in the air."

"Something is, yes. I don't know what. I know they're expecting Arthur Porefoy and his wife, Ardeth; they're late. But it isn't that. They're usually late. It's fashionable, you see; so they come late."

"How do you know they're not here? Or do you know all the maskers?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I happen to know how they're masking. They're coming as Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne; there's no one here who looks remotely like either one of them. So they're late. Oh, they'll come before twelve; they always do. But it isn't the Porefoys; it's something else. I can feel it."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Do you believe in the psychic?" she countered.

"Yes and no," I answered.

"Ah, you're playing it on the safe side. Now, I'm psychic, I'm uneasy because I know there's something wrong, something very much wrong about Hartson's party, and I can't put my finger on it."

"I think we all have feelings like that from time to time," I said. "That's no proof of the psychic. The scientists have shown —"

"Oh, they're so glib, so smooth, so sure of themselves!" she protested impatiently.

"Aren't they!" I agreed.

There was something in what she said, just the same. The air of the

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masquerade was thickening, the feeling of strangeness was deepening. I could see the maskers looking uneasily about. A new mask had joined the throng, in fire-red; he was the Mask of the Red Death, and he certainly caught the eyes of most of the dancers, for he was tall and terrible and impressive — his was a wonderfully effective costume!

"My God!" whispered Bluebeard's tenth wife, "that's Johnny Deakin — and isn't he exciting!"

"Isn't he a little tall for Deakin?" I asked.

She looked again, anxiously. "He *is* a little tall," she conceded. "But he might be wearing something on his feet to make him look taller."

"Half a foot?" I asked.

"Oh, no — three or four inches."

"It could be his costume."

"It's his build, though; you can see that through all the flummery."

The dance came to an end and Maryla joined me as soon as Bluebeard's tenth wife walked away. The Mask of the Red Death stalked grandly and menacingly among the dancers; people looked after him, some of them in puzzlement, some with what seemed to be recognition.

"What a creation!" said Maryla.

"It must have taken him half the evening to get into that costume," I said.

"Listen, I hope you don't mind, but I've smitten Apollo."

"Oh, congratulations," I said. "I've made quite an impression on Cinderella, too."

"Oh, that one. I thought it was this last one. I would have preferred her," Maryla said, a little coldly.

"Darling, you don't mind?"

"Of course not. I'm dancing again with Apollo. I think I might go outside with him."

I looked at the clock. "Probably that would be a good idea. We ought to get away before the unmasking takes place. That would be midnight; these dances are long. Can you manage? I'll try to make it at about the same time. Meet you somewhere outside."

"All right."

I looked over at Apollo. He had his eye on Maryla, undoubtedly. He had a magnificent physique, though he was only of medium height, and not as tall as Maryla usually liked men to be.

"You certainly can pick them," I murmured.

"Listen," she said again, urgently. "Don't you feel this choking queerness in the room?"

"Yes. I've felt it all along. The rest of them are beginning to feel it, too. They're waiting for the Porefoys, for one thing."

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"Who are they?"

"That couple we met."

"Oh, yes — Dimmesdale and Hester. Older people."

The music struck up again. We found partners and danced.

I took a turn with my hostess once more, then another woman, and finally I took Cinderella out again.

"It's close to midnight," she said, teasingly. "Are you getting ready to bite?"

"Darling, I've been whetting my teeth all evening," I said.

"Oh, you're funny!" she said giggling. "I'll bet you say that to all the girls."

I laughed. "How did you know?" I asked. "But they never believe me; I'm losing my touch."

"Do you know, you're cold," she said.

"Oh, I might be — here. I don't like crowds. But if we were alone, I rather think I wouldn't be so cold."

She giggled again. It had an almost nasty sound.

"Where's your Prince?" I asked.

"I left him at home," she answered.

"It's getting uncommonly warm and uncomfortable in this room," I said then, having just seen Maryla slip away with Apollo, out of a back door.

Cinderella gave me an arch look. "The French windows are just over there. We could step outside for a moment. It's warm there, too."

"But it wouldn't be stuffy."

"We could walk in the gardens."

"Could we?"

"If you liked. You make me very curious. I'm going to hang on to you until midnight and find out who you are."

"Oh, we came as ourselves," I said. "Or didn't I tell you?"

We slipped out through the partly open French windows and found ourselves on a wide verandah. One or two other couples were there, too. I looked quickly around, just in time to see Maryla and her Apollo vanishing into the shrubbery of the well-appointed garden that stretched away beyond the house.

"The gardens are that way," whispered Cinderella.

Behind us the music ceased suddenly, and a hubbub of conversation rose, mingled with cries of consternation and horror.

"Something happened," I said.

"Just a moment. I'll see."

Cinderella joined the other dancers crowding back into the room from the verandah, but in a few moments she was back at my side, taking my

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hand confidently in hers, and leading the way to the gardens, rapidly, before anyone could catch us moving away from the house. She must have had some relative among the dancers, or someone who might have followed; and she did not intend that we should be followed.

"What was it?" I asked.

"Oh, some ghastly joke," she answered. "It's just like Arthur Porefoy; he's always doing things like that. He sent three people masquerading as policemen to tell the Hartsons that he and his wife had been murdered down the road a little way, and they're spreading a wild story about how they stopped because they apparently had motor trouble, and were killed by animals or something of that kind. Porefoy always has had bad taste."

"Yes," I agreed. "A bad taste and thinned blood. Both of them."

"My God! they're the tightest people I know. It must have cost them something to do a stunt like this one — unless the policemen owed him money."

We were in the gardens now, and just ahead of us we could see Maryla and her Apollo. They were languid. She was leaning on his arm, and he was acting possessive and proud. He was definitely on the make, and Maryla was leading him on, just as she always does.

Looking at them, I was aware once more of that curiously tense anxiety I had known throughout the evening. "Do you know Apollo?" I asked.

"Sure," she answered. "He's my cousin, Dick Girdler."

Let them get ahead, I thought. I deliberately held back, moving closer to Cinderella.

"That's a lovely locket," I said.

I reached out to touch it, but something happened. I couldn't reach it. Something like a wall stood between me and the locket. It felt warm, hot — hot as the center of that revulsion I had experienced dancing with her.

"Oh, that," she said, and laughed. "It's an heirloom — and so old! I couldn't begin to tell you how old. It's supposed to contain a fragment of the true cross." She laughed again. "But nobody believes in superstitions like that any more, do they?"

"No," I said, "of course not."

I stopped. The locket burned on her throat; it burned in my sight.

"What's the matter?" she asked, smiling flirtatiously. "Have you lost your yen to bite?"

"I've been thinking of your cousin. After all, I know my sister. Maryla can be unpleasant."

"I don't doubt it. I must confess I don't like her looks."

"Do you mind very much if I just run forward and see that everything's all right?"

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She shook her head. "Not at all. I had no idea you were so — shall we say, old-fashioned?"

"Oh, I am, I am," I said.

I hurried down the garden. Tension and unease flowed out behind me. That confounded locket! I should have known.

Maryla was in his arms, teasing him.

"Maryla," I said.

She broke free of him, her eyes blazing with anger. "Go away."

"Look," I said, making a signal of danger she understood. "Come."

"Go away," she said again, furiously. "Can't you see?"

I could see plainly enough. Hunger took precedence over all else. Gluttony, rather. After the Reverend Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne, even Apollo could hardly be more than an anti-climax.

"Your husband?" asked Apollo, holding on to her.

"Absurd," said Maryla. "He interferes."

"It would be better to come at once," I said, nettled.

"Look, brother," said Apollo aggressively. "Take a powder, can't you?"

"I won't be long," said Maryla.

I could believe that. I said, "Now."

"Maybe I could persuade you," said Apollo.

I looked at him. He had clenched one fist suggestively. It would serve him right, I thought. But Maryla vexed me. She knew that her obedience was mandatory, but this exposure to American freedom for her sex had gone to her head.

"Why don't you go back to your castle or your coffin or wherever you came from," said Apollo.

"Thanks," I said.

I turned and went back to where Cinderella was waiting.

"Look," I said. "Your cousin's in danger."

"What danger?"

"Must you ask?" I cried. "Her teeth are sharper than mine."

"Claws, more likely," she said.

"Will you do something? It might sound foolish, but —"

Her eyes gleamed. "What is it?"

"Will you go down there where they are and go up to them and just take your locket and touch her with it?"

She looked at me open-mouthed. "Are you serious?"

"Perfectly. You'll surprise her. You'll really surprise her. She'll hardly be able to bear it."

She cradled the locket in her hand and looked at it. "This locket?" she said wonderingly.

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I nodded. "She has an allergy to crosses — especially true crosses."

"Oh, I get it," she said. "Her cross is the double-cross." She laughed immoderately.

That, in addition to her locket! I gritted my teeth as much as I was able and held myself in. "Please, will you?" I said.

"Will she jump?" she asked.

"She certainly will." I smiled.

She made a curious figure O with her thumb and index finger and said, "You're in. I'm on."

And away she went.

That will teach Maryla, I thought. If I have to go without dinner, by Hell! so will she! I moved away into the shadows to wait for her. She would be coming in a hurry, smarting and furious.

I heard her scream. It gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

In a moment she came running out, almost carelessly fast. She saw me and came at me in a direct line.

"Beast!" she cried.

"I warned you," I said.

"He was so pliable, so strong; he would have been so *good!* We could have shared him."

"Is it too late?" I asked. "Look. Or does she know?"

Cinderella sped toward the house, one hand clapped to her mouth.

"Ridiculous. She thought it was a game."

"And now he comes. He's really smitten."

Apollo came out, looking this way and that, calling softly.

"Ass," I whispered.

"I'm here," Maryla called.

"Hurry," I said.

She moved toward him, and I edged around to be ready on the other side.

There was so little time. But I could count on Maryla. She is always so anxious, so voracious, so ravenously hungry, and she works so fast, so cleanly!

She was right about him, too. It would have been a mistake to leave him

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In most science fiction stories, the men of earth have successfully established an impervious empire over all the lesser breeds of the Galaxy, ruling as a sort of cross between Pukka Sahibs and Roman procurators . . . only of course in a strictly new American version. In the reports of a few subversive dissenters, earth men are baffled by totally alien civilizations and retire in frustration. These two alternatives are not, however, the only answer to the question of the relation between Terran conquerors and subject native races, as Gordon Dickson — a Minnesotan of 28 who says he decided to be a writer twenty-one years ago, and has certainly implemented his decision ably in the past couple of years — subtly demonstrates in this sensitive story.

Listen

by GORDON R. DICKSON

RERU did not like to see humans eat. So he was waiting in the living room while Taddy and his parents finished breakfast.

"— And quite right, too," boomed Taddy's father. "He has as much right to his own ways as we have to ours. Remember that, Taddy, when you grow up. The only reason humans have been successful conquerors throughout the galaxy is because they have always respected the attitudes and opinions of the people they conquered."

"Oh, Harry!" said Taddy's mother. "He's too young to understand all that."

"I am not young," said Taddy defensively, through a mouthful of breakfast food. "I'm four years old."

"See there, Celia," said Taddy's father, laughing. "He's four years old — practically grown up. But seriously, honey, he's going to be growing up into a world in which the great majority of thinking beings are Mirians like Reru. He should start to understand the natives early."

"Well, I don't know," said Taddy's mother, worriedly. "After all, he was born in space on the way here and he's a delicate child —"

"Delicate, nonsense!" boomed Taddy's father. "He comes from the toughest race in the galaxy. Look at these Mirians, chained to their planet by a symbiosis so extensive that our biologists haven't reached the end of the chain, yet. Look at Reru himself, gentle, non-combative, unenergetic, a

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stalwart example of the Mirian Race and therefore — the ideal nursemaid for our son."

"Oh, I don't have a word of complaint to say against Reru," answered Taddy's mother. "He's been just wonderful with Taddy. But I can't help it — when he cocks his head on one side and starts *listening* the way they all do, I get a little bit scared of him."

"Damn it, Celia!" said Taddy's father. "I've told you a thousand times that he's just hearing one of their cows calling that it wants to be milked."

Taddy squirmed in his chair. He knew all about the cows. They were six-legged Mirian animals that roamed around much as Reru and his kind roamed around. When they were full of milk they would start making a high, whistling sound, and Reru or some other Mirian would come along and attach his suckers to them and drink the milk. But the cows were no longer interesting. Reru was; and Taddy had finished his breakfast food.

"I'm all through," he broke in suddenly on his parents' conversation. "Can I go now? Can I?"

"I guess so," said Taddy's mother and Taddy scrambled from the chair and ran off toward the living room.

"Don't go too far!" his mother's voice floated after him, followed by his father's deep bass.

"Let him go. Reru will bring him back all right. And, anyway, what on this planet of vegetarians could harm him?"

But Taddy had already forgotten his mother's words. For Reru was waiting for him, and Reru was fascinating.

He looked, at first glance, like a miniature copy of an old Chinese Mandarin, with robe, bald head, and little wispy beard. It was only when you got to know him that you realized that there were tentacles beneath the robe, that he had never had hair on his head, and that the wispy beard hid and protected the suckers with which he milked the *cows* that were his source of food.

But Taddy liked him very much; and Taddy didn't think that there was anything the least bit strange about him.

"Where are we going today, Reru?" demanded Taddy, bouncing up and down before the little Mirian who was not quite twice as tall as he was.

Reru's voice was like the voice of a trilling bird, and it sang more than it spoke.

"Good morning, Taddy," it trilled. "Where would you like to go?"

"I want to go to the silver and green place," cried Taddy. "Can we go?"

Reru's dark little mandarin face did not smile because it did not have the muscles to do so. But the mouth opened and the Mirian gave a short wordless trill expressive of happiness and pleasure.

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"Yes, small Taddy," Reru answered. "We can go." And, turning with a kind of stately dignity, he led the way out of the dwelling and into the soft yellow Mirian sunlight.

"Oh, good, good, good!" sang Taddy, skipping along beside him.

They went away from the buildings of the humans, out across the low rolling grassland of Miria, Taddy bounding and leaping in the light gravity and Reru gliding along with effortless ease. And if that dignified glide was the result of twisting tentacles hidden beneath the robe, what of it? Where older humans might have felt squeamish at the thought of the twisting ropes of white muscle, Taddy took it entirely for granted. To him, Reru was beautiful.

They went on across the grasslands. Several times Reru stopped to *listen* and each time Taddy tried to imitate him, standing with his tousled head cocked on one side and an intent expression on his baby face. After one of these stops his brow furrowed and he seemed to be thinking. The little Mirian noticed him.

"What is it, Taddy?" he trilled.

"Daddy says that when you listen, you're listening to the cows," Taddy answered. "You hear more than that, don't you, Reru?"

"Yes, Taddy," said Reru, "I am listening to all my brothers."

"Oh," said the boy, wisely. "I thought so."

As they went on, the grassland began to dip, and after a while a patch of deeper green came into sight in the distance.

"There it is," trilled the Mirian. Taddy broke into a run.

"Let's hurry, Reru," cried the boy, pulling at the mandarin robe. "Come *on*, Reru!"

Reru increased his glide and they hurried forward until they came to the silver-and-green place.

It was fairy-like in its beauty. Little green islands and clumps of vegetation were interspersed with flashing slivers of water, so that no matter where you stood, some small reflective surface caught the yellow light of the sun and sent it winking into your eyes. It looked, for all the world, like a toy landscape on which some giant had broken his mirror and left the bits to sparkle and shine in the daytime brightness. Reru squatted and Taddy sat down on the edge of one of the pools.

"What does it say?" asked the boy. "Tell me what it says, Reru."

The Mirian trilled again his little trill of pleasure; then composed himself. For a long time he sat silent, *listening*, while the boy squirmed, impatient, yet not daring to say anything that might interrupt or delay what Reru was about to say. Finally, the Mirian spoke.

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"I can hear my brother the cow down in the tall grass at the edge of a pool. I can hear him as he moves among the grass; and I hear what he hears, his little brother, the dweller in the ground who stores up rich food for my brother the cow. And I can hear still further to all the other little brothers of the world as they go about their appointed tasks, until the air is thick with the sound of their living and their memories are my memories and their thoughts my thoughts.

"So the green-and-silver place is filled with a mighty thought; and this is what that thought says:

" 'The green-and-silver place is a coming together of waters that have traveled a long way. Our brothers in the earth have told us that there are three waters that come together here, and none flow in the light of day. Our brothers of the waters have told us that these waters run far, for they have traveled the waters.

" 'One comes from the south, but the other two from the north. And the ones from the north travel side by side for a long way, with the dark and silent earth between and around them, until they come out in a colder land to the far north of here. And, in the far north, the two come together and their source is a single river that comes from a high mountain where the winds blow over bare rock. And in that place there is a brother who lives on the stones of the hillside and watches the stars at night. He has listened along the water and heard us down here in the warm grasslands; and he dreams of the green-and-silver place as he lies at night on the bare rock, watching the stars.

" 'But the water that comes from the south comes from deep beneath the mountains of the south, from a silent lake in the heart of the rock. The lake is filled by the water that trickles down the veins of the mountains; and in it lives another brother who is blind and has never seen the yellow sun. But he lies in the dark on a rock shelf above the silent lake and listens to the grumbling of the world as it talks to itself deep in the heart of the planet. And he, too, has heard us here in the warm grasslands, under the light of the yellow sun, and he dreams of the green-and-silver place as he lies on his rock ledge listening to the grumbling of the world.' "

Reru ceased talking and opened his eyes.

"That is only one story, Taddy," he said, "of the green-and-silver place."

"More," begged the boy. "Tell me more, Reru."

And he looked up into the alien face with eyes glowing in the wonder and excitement of what he had just heard. And Reru told him more.

The morning was nearly gone when they returned to Taddy's home, and Taddy's father and mother were already seated at the table eating lunch.

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"Late again, Taddy," said his mother, with mock anger.

"No, I'm not," Taddy retorted, sliding into his place. "You're early."

"You are a little early at that, Celia," said Taddy's father. "How come?"

"Oh, I promised to go over to visit Julia this afternoon," answered Taddy's mother. "Taddy! Did you wash your hands?"

"Uh-huh," said Taddy with a vigorous nod, his mouth already full. "Look!" He displayed them at arms' length.

"Where did you go today, anyway?" asked his mother.

"To the green-and-silver place," answered Taddy.

"Green-and-silver place?" She looked across at her husband. "Where's that, Harry?"

"Darned if I know," answered Taddy's father. "Where is it, son?"

Taddy pointed in a southwesterly direction.

"Out there," he said. "There's lots of little pieces of water and lots of little bushes and things."

"Why," said Harry, "he must mean the swamp."

"The swamp!" echoed Taddy's mother. "He spent the whole morning out at a swamp! Harry, you have to do something. It isn't healthy for a boy to go mooning around like these Mirians."

"Now, Celia," grumbled Taddy's father. "The Mirians put their planet before everything else. It's almost a form of worship with them. But that can't possibly affect Taddy. Humans are just too big and strong to be seduced into that dead-end sort of philosophy. Anyway, that swamp's going to be drained shortly and they're going to put a building in its place."

He leaned across the table toward Taddy.

"You'd like that better, now, wouldn't you, son?" he said. "A big new building to run around in instead of that water and muck!"

The boy's face had gone completely white and his mouth was open.

"You can get Reru to take you over and watch it go up," his father went on.

"No!" said the boy, suddenly and violently.

"Why, Taddy!" said his mother. "Is that any way to talk to your father? Now, you apologise at once."

"I won't," said Taddy.

"Taddy!" his father's big voice rumbled dangerously.

"I don't care!" cried Taddy. Suddenly the words were tumbling out of him all at once. "I hate you! I hate your old buildings! When I grow up I'm going to tear down that old building and put all the water and things back." He was crying now, and his words came interspersed with sobs. "I don't like you here. Nobody else likes you either. Why don't you go 'way? Why don't you all go 'way?"

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Taddy's father sat dumbfounded. But Taddy's mother got quickly up from her chair and around to Taddy's. She took him by the arm and pulled him away from the table.

"It's his nerves," she said. "I knew all this running around was bad for him." And she led him off in the direction of his room, his wails diminishing with distance and the closing of a door.

After a little while she came back.

"You see?" she said triumphantly to her husband. "Now he'll have to stay in bed all afternoon and I can't go over to Julia's because I'll have to stay here and watch him."

But Taddy's father had recovered his composure.

"Nonsense, Celia," he said. "It's just a case of nerves, like you said. Every boy has them one time or another. We can let the young pioneer kick up a few fusses without worrying too much about it. It won't hurt his character any. Now, you go on over to Julia's as you planned. He'll stay put."

"Well," said Taddy's mother slowly, wanting to be convinced, "if you say so — I don't suppose it would do any harm to run over for a few minutes. . . ."

Up in his room, Taddy's sobs diminished until they no longer racked his small body. He got up and went to the window and looked out at the rolling grasslands.

"I will, too," he said to himself, "I will too tear down all their old buildings when I grow up."

And, immediately he said it, a strange thing seemed to happen. A wave of peace flooded over him and he stopped crying. It was as if all the brothers that Reru had been talking about were here in the room and just outside his window, comforting him. He felt them all around him; and at the same time he sensed that they were all waiting for him to say something, waiting and listening. For just a few seconds he could feel all of Miria listening to him, to Taddy.

And he knew what they wanted; for he stretched both his arms out the window to them, a love filling his heart like no love he had ever felt before, as he spoke the two words they were waiting to hear.

"I promise," said Taddy.

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Not unique in fantasy writing — though it may be so in other fields — is the collaboration between the "old pro" and the promising beginner. Examples that quickly come to mind are those of the young Ray Bradbury with the veteran Henry Hasse, the tyro Mark Schorer with that sage of Sauk City, August Derleth — who seemingly produced saleable fiction before he learned to walk! There are others, of course; in no other phase of the writing profession is the solidly established practitioner so willing to give the youngster a lift, a boost up the ladder. We have no intention of divulging editorial secrets by telling you what of the following story is Mr. Kelly's work and what is Mr. Cartmill's. Suffice it to say that each has a valid claim to an equal share of the by-line. Their joint effort has resulted in a grim postulation of what constitutes sanity . . . or insanity. It further demonstrates a neat method — if you can but manage it — of leaving your prison behind you.

Nor Iron Bars

by DAN KELLY & CLEVE CARTMILL

"You're overlooking something — or hiding it," Brock said. "What you've told me is impossible."

Dr. Drew Kinsman continued to look into the blazing fire for a few moments, and in the silence the Maine coast storm outside howled in a higher key. Then he raised his calm, dark eyes to those of his host.

"It can't be impossible," he said quietly. "It happened."

Brock slapped his knee with a fleshy, pink hand and the color in his ruddy cheeks mounted.

"These are the facts you gave me," he said belligerently, and ticked them off with pudgy fingers. "A man under observation in the prison wing of the psychopathic ward. Bars on the windows looking on a nine-story drop. The door double-locked and under constant guard. No other exits. You have one of the keys to the door, the guard has the other. The patient didn't go out the windows or the door. But he disappeared." Brock snorted. "It smells like collusion to me, or connivance, or whatever."

Dr. Kinsman was unruffled. "I give you my word he was locked in and when the door was *next* opened he was gone."

"Well," Brock grumbled, "your word's good with me. The only answer

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in that case is that the thing couldn't happen. I like puzzles. You know I'm considered an expert. But this . . . there just *isn't* any explanation."

"Oh, yes, Brock. There is an explanation."

Brock squinted his bright blue eyes suspiciously. "Don't give me metaphysics. Or the supernatural. I won't accept either."

"I won't. The explanation is physical. Purely physical. The prisoner-patient left it in his cell-room."

"A hacksaw I'll believe — maybe."

"No. A few sheets of paper. Want to read them?"

"Why not?" Brock said, and went over to take a thin sheaf of writing-size sheets from Dr. Kinsman. "Want to fix us a drink while I look this over?"

He settled his considerable bulk under a lamp, accepted the drink when Dr. Kinsman brought it, and began to read:

I am writing this account with a dual purpose in mind. First, to get out of this horrible dream world, if possible, and back among my own people.

Second, to warn others.

To extricate myself if I *am* dreaming, and I am positive that this is the case.

To warn others, if this indeed is reality, against the nightmare world that lies just over the edge of consciousness.

I am writing this in prison. Oh, it is called a psychopathic ward, an observation ward and other euphemisms, but it is a prison, nevertheless.

I am insane, they say. Not in so many words, of course. Dr. Kinsman, the head psychiatrist, refers to my alleged condition as "a perhaps temporary maladjustment." I overheard him utter that very mouthful of confusion.

Well, I say it now, and I will say it again and again: I am not insane, I am only dreaming.

I know this is true, because I have had this same dream many times before.

Let me emphasize that I am alone and am being perfectly honest with myself. I have reasoned this out, and I wish to give a true account of the facts, not of the twitterings of so-called men of science. Psychiatrists! Fools!

They know and admit that I am dreaming. Their agreement is a way of dealing with something they do not understand. They avoid explanation by saying it has no bearing on my case.

But they are idiots. The entire crux of my so-called case is the recurrent dream. The one I am now dreaming.

They say I was brought to this prison in a strait jacket. Oh, they were not as direct as that in their replies to my questions, but I prefer to deal bluntly with *their* facts. They *say* that I went to a certain psychiatrist on the evening of August 27.

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I well remember it was a hot, oppressive night, typical August heat. But I did *not* go to a psychiatrist that night. Or any other. A psychiatrist is the last person in the worlds I would have wished to see, as you will perceive later.

But to get on with *their* facts. I had presumably gone to a psychiatrist to consult him about a recurrent dream which was bothering me tremendously.

And that is where they were damnably clever. This recurrent dream *was* bothering me even to the extent of ruining my sleep and interfering with my work. But for *me* to visit a psychiatrist . . .

They say that I was fatigued by the heat and loss of sleep and that I disagreed violently with the psychiatrist and his diagnosis. They say that I twisted his findings to mean that I was insane and that I attacked him in a rage.

They say that a fellow doctor and the psychiatrist, with the aid of neighbors, subdued me and brought me here in the strait jacket.

I have seen the sworn affidavits of the psychiatrist, the doctor and the other witnesses. I have seen the examining doctors' faces. I have seen the witnesses, the doctor who they say helped to subdue me, and his neighbors.

And I never saw any of these people before, except in my dream.

That is their story, and it has logic — the diabolical logic so often found in dreams. But here are the true facts.

I have always dreamed, ever since I can remember, and my dreams have always been vivid. But memories of them faded away with daylight and waking, except in the case of this recurrent dream which now enmeshes me.

It first began several years ago. In the beginning I found myself in a strange city seeking a quiet room where I could write a book on famous athletes.

At this point I would awaken in my bed in a cold sweat of terror. Why this should be I could not, and do not, completely understand. But the terror impressed the details on my mind so deeply that I began to spend much time, time that I could ill afford, on thinking of the dream.

Then, gradually, my dream-life progressed a bit further each time. I found the room. I paid the landlady, Mrs. Carson, six months in advance. I moved in. I began to write *with my left hand.* I want to emphasize that. *With my left hand.*

Each time I awakened in my own bed I was in the same sweat of terror. I worried. I lost weight.

When I return to that room in my dream, I pass off questions about my absence with the explanation that I have been away, doing research on my book. I cannot bring myself to tell Mrs. Carson that I am dreaming.

And still the dream progresses. I go out of my room. I purchase meals.

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I work on my book. I pay another six months' rent, and another and another, and — but I have lost count.

Then, for the first time, I find myself walking down a street to keep an appointment with a psychiatrist I have never seen, whose name I do not know. I seem to realize, even in the dream, that it is the dream itself which impels me to seek relief. This dream which has been my deepest secret, that, waking, I cannot mention to anyone, or, sleeping, cannot bear to tell to those who people the dream.

Against my will I turn into a dark doorway and am ushered into an office where sits a man whose face I now recognize as that of the psychiatrist who claims to have interviewed me on the night of August 27.

The entire dream is soundless, which only increases the agony of my terror. But even though there is no sound I know what he is thinking. The implications are in his eyes, the insinuations are in his smile and his gestures. He implies that I am mentally unbalanced, and somehow I know that I will never leave his office of my own free will.

But even that knowledge does not make me do what I do. Something outside myself compels me to leap at the man behind the desk and attempt to throttle him. His cries for help are answered and the rest of the dream bears out their version. I am brought by force to this institution, interviewed, analyzed, incarcerated.

And that is why I am so sure of what actually happened on the night of August 27. Ever since this dream began terrorizing my nights I have feared creating just this set of circumstances. That is why I know I did not go to a psychiatrist. No, I would not, did not, consult a psychiatrist on the night of August 27.

Instead, I stayed at home. I went into my den determined to conquer this dream that was ruining my nights and disturbing my days. And it was in my den that I must have dozed off. It is in my den that I must be sleeping now and dreaming this terrible dream.

As I have noted previously, the dream has become clearer and more complete with each recurrence. For example, this is the first time I have dreamed of writing these pages, but that does not astonish me. Each succeeding dream has been more horribly real, more accurate in detail and progressively longer.

And, in addition, I will point out the glaring impossibility of this being reality. I have not mentioned this to the doctors. It would be useless. They would only brush it aside as irrelevant, to be explained perhaps as a psychosis or frustrated impulse.

What I mean is this. In my dream I am left-handed, and this is physically impossible. I broke my left wrist years ago while on a hunting trip. It was set

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imperfectly, and was stiff when it healed. I have never had it rebroken and reset. I *cannot* write with my left hand. And yet I am doing so.

I must say it again, and again, and again. This is a dream, a dream, a . . .

The manuscript ended abruptly. Brock laid it aside, lit a cigaret and finished off his drink. He stared into the fire for a few moments, then looked across at Dr. Kinsman, who was puffing calmly at his pipe.

"I believe you said there was a *physical* explanation of this patient's escape?"

"Disappearance is a better word. Oh, yes, a physical explanation."

"Short of turning into a bird and flying out the window, I don't believe it," Brock said shortly. He tapped the manuscript. "This schizophrenic hogwash offers no explanation of anything except the true condition of his mind."

Dr. Kinsman smiled. "Suppose I tell you that we have checked each statement in that manuscript that is possible to check — and found it true."

"Even so —"

"Wait. The man did rent a room from a Mrs. Carson, several years ago. He was writing a book on athletes. He disappeared and reappeared at odd irregular times."

"A regular Houdini," Brock interrupted.

"He is remembered at the nearby restaurant," Dr. Kinsman went on smoothly. "And his left wrist was stiff as a result of clumsy setting. He would never have written with his left hand voluntarily after the break, even if he had been left-handed before."

"I . . . think I see what you're getting at," Brock said suspiciously. "Let's leave the supernatural out of this."

"Nothing supernatural," Dr. Kinsman promised. "He disappeared from that room by physical means. Let me point out one other statement of his. You possibly took it for a plural made in error. He makes the statement that a psychiatrist is the last person in the *worlds* he would want to see."

"Yes? And so. . . ?"

"You are familiar with the theory of alternate universes, existing in time side by side, each unknown to the other?"

"Mmm, yes. Theory."

"Very well, scoff. But add to his use of the term 'worlds' the fact that he *did* write with his left hand, when it would have been completely improbable, and you have the explanation of how he disappeared from that room by physical means."

Dr. Kinsman paused for emphasis, and quietly added:

"He woke up."

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The one occasion upon which we regret our policy of no interior decoration is when we introduce some of our authors — especially a few of our discoveries. Physical beauty is not (we are devoutly thankful!) a necessity for a literary career; but it can undeniably brighten the lives of a couple of middle-aged editors. Garen Drussaï, whose first story we present here, is Hungarian and stunning; she is an impassioned and articulate debater on such topics as pacifism and Forteanism; and she has a refreshing ability to come up with new variants on science-fictional notions. Just which notion she chooses to play with here shall, for the moment, go unmentioned; its concealment is part of the fascination of this appealingly offtrail story.

Extra-Curricular

by GAREN DRUSSAÏ

LITTLE MARIA lay snug; sleeping deep down in her rough hewn cradle. Her mother's toe kept it rocking smoothly to the rhythm of the whirling spinning wheel. A high wind drew steadily at the log fire. All was comfortable and serene inside the cabin.

Ellen took her eyes off her work occasionally to lavish a glance at her year-old daughter. The ball of yarn was almost finished when a fearful whimper from the cradle drew Ellen's attention again.

The bright blue eyes were wide open, looking intently at her mother. Ellen stopped spinning and smiled reassuringly.

"Ah, so you're awake, my little Maria! My little pink rosebud."

Maria grasped the edges of her cradle and sat up. "For goodness sake, Mother. Stop that gushy baby-talk!"

Ellen stared woodenly, her smile fixed on her face.

"What are you looking at me like that for, Mother?"

She wrenched her eyes away from the innocent babyishness. The fire burned as brightly as before. She glanced at the door; it remained closed, the wind sucking at its edges. The room hadn't changed; it was as warm and familiar as always.

"Mother, what's the matter with you? Is it so inconceivable that a person my age can communicate verbally with an adult? Is that wrong?"

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Almost against her will Ellen found herself answering.

"Maria, stop this nonsense! Your father won't be home for another hour. He . . . well, you know, he would have liked to have been here when . . ." Her voice dropped in a sigh of helplessness. Great sogging tears, which she'd managed to hold back till now, rushed out on her cheeks. "My baby, my dear, dear baby — you're only a year old. I must be going out of my mind!"

Maria shook her blonde head in compassion. "Oh dear, I guess I didn't realize your mental status was so unstable. I thought speech would make it possible for us to communicate on an intelligent level."

It was too much! Ellen raised her hands in front of her eyes uncomprehendingly, and slumped to the floor.

A short while later Maria's father kicked the mud off his boots, and opened the door.

She sat in her cradle, contentedly chewing on her blanket.

"Ah goo, da da!" she gurgled.

Bubbles smiled from the lights. Directly at him, this time.

Bob Lawrence grinned back and pushed the empty glass to the center of the table. He waved an eager waiter away and settled expansively in his chair.

The line of shapely chorus legs swung mechanically into the last bars of the number, while all three pieces of the nondescript orchestra bawled their lungs out. There was a mad flurry of posteriors among the feathery costumes. Each of the girls "fluffed" as provocatively as was possible after having run through five shows, and raced off the stage for the dressing room.

Bob's usually pedantic face wore its most "lady-welcoming" expression as, a few minutes later, Bubbles maneuvered her hips through the tables toward him. He pulled her chair up, and brought his over close, saying, "Bubbles, you look positively enchanting this evening!"

She smiled enigmatically. A worried expression, as if she were trying to make up a wise-crack, passed over her face.

"Order me a drink, willya Bobbie honey? I suddenly don't feel so pretty good."

Bob smiled ingratiatingly and signaled the waiter.

"You know, Bubbles, you not only look divine, but you look different tonight." He cocked his head to one side exaggeratedly. "Can't exactly put my finger on it . . . you actually seem to have a certain cerebral quality about you."

Bubbles giggled vacuously, just as though she understood what he was talking about. She always did.

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She took a sip of her drink and laid her hand across his, squeezing his fingers. "Your perspicacity is really amazing, Robert. Do you mean that it's that apparent?"

Robert's jaw sagged open.

"Do you want me to elucidate?" she smiled.

He shook his head feebly.

"Well, Robert, I want to explain it to you anyway. You see, I've been thinking . . ."

Robert managed a weak smile.

". . . my current status in this stratum of existence is primarily the consequence of planet-wide stupidity."

Bob's eyes almost crossed. "What in the hell has got into you?" he spluttered, unmindful of the fact that he was attracting a few amused glances.

"You know, as well as I do, Bob, that there's really no need for female entertainers like myself to remain in a state of vacuity all their lives. One can amalgamate sexual and intellectual attributes, and be the more enticing for the coalescence."

"Now, Robert, close your mouth. You look like an idiot!"

He stared wildly at her, but she smiled soothingly back at him without changing expression.

"By God, I want to know, and I want to know right now, just what do you think you've been putting over?" The pitch of his voice had risen till, by now, several people at the bar and surrounding tables had turned to see.

"Robert, sit down. Please! You're making an exhibition of yourself. Besides, I'm not through telling you everything."

"No, I won't shut up and I won't sit down," he screamed. "I get it all now. You're one of those sorority-bred females on a slumming spree, aren't you, Miss Smarty? Well, let me tell you a thing or two now . . ."

Bubbles rose to her full five foot two, knocking her chair over in her haste. "Listen to me, you pompous ass," she cried. "You're insufferable, coming in here like a knight on a white horse, giving poor little Miss Nobody a whirl."

She stamped her foot. "You just want everybody to know how democratic you are!"

"So! You've just been pretending to be my intellectual inferior," he snapped back at her, "thinking it makes you more desirable. You little demon, you!" He reached across the table before she could step back, and gave her a head-ringing slap.

There was a gagged silence. But before Bob could make another move the bouncers were upon him. One grabbed each arm as Bubbles burst into tears.

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"Oh Bobbie," she wailed. "How couldja do a thing like that? I never did nothin' to ya. Oh, go way, I dowanna see you no more!"

The bouncers lifted Bob to his toes and dragged him silently away, his face dazed and vacant.

On this particular evening the Hotel Allington's Universe Room was humming with a different kind of din than usual. For inside, tonight, were gathered men and women representing every branch of science in the inhabited solar system, from astronautics to photosynthesis. There were experts and authorities from every race, nation and planet, and they were enjoying themselves completely.

Katherine Hewitt Baxter, in whose honor this extraordinary session had been called, sat with her half empty dinner plate before her. Dr. Katherine Baxter! she mused. In a few more minutes, an Honorary Member of the Solar Federation of Scientists.

Some of the people out there were her friends; some of them she'd barely heard of before. But, all of them, strangers and friends alike, had come to acknowledge her scientific achievement.

Katherine finally pushed her plate away and turned to the man on her left. "It's really so gratifying and splendid a thing to have happen to me, Dr. Mitchell, that I'm afraid I'm quite numbed." She shook her grayed, closely cropped head in a gesture of self-amusement.

"Nonsense!" boomed the Chairman, sandwiching her in grandly between mouthfuls. "You're a great scientist. The Solar System is enormously indebted to you for your discovery of Flotnium!"

Katherine pursed her narrow lips, and looked down at her lean, capable hands. "I've made it my life's work," she said simply.

Gradually the clatter of plates was silenced, and the waiters pushed the last dish-laden carts from the room. After officially clearing his throat several times and consuming two glasses of water, Dr. Mitchell rose.

Chairs shifted so that all the dinner guests faced the speaker's table. He adjusted the microphone and started to speak.

"Dear friends. . . ."

She listened with just part of her mind. Only disjointed snatches of what Dr. Mitchell was saying reached her ears.

". . . one of the great in the world of science . . . has given her life to . . ."

She concentrated harder, trying to think only of the speech she was about to make.

". . . believe that Flotnium will revolutionize the science of metallurgy for centuries to come. No honor is too great . . ."

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Abruptly her thin taut face started to soften. Then she smiled slightly and easily, as though the lines had finally fallen into place. Her hand played idly on the table; her fingers making random and pointless tracings on the white cloth.

Dr. Mitchell finished and, with the grandest gesture he could summon, turned toward Katherine.

"Fellow scientists: it is seldom that I have the opportunity to introduce so distinguished an individual as our new Honorary Member. I give you . . . Dr. Katherine . . . Hewitt . . . Baxter!"

Katherine rose and smiled, nodding at the long ovation. Dr. Mitchell rapped the table smartly for silence, and leaned back in his seat to light his after-dinner cigar.

"My dear friends," she began, as the noise subsided, "with the acme and equivocation in the new motto, it quite understandably to make 60 out of remembrance! And familiarity notwithstanding, achromatic potential counterclockwise by no man. So the tractive force not dissociated of grapple, categorically lingers in the non-existence of suddenly tinsel!"

She paused briefly and, assured of the impact of her words, added, "Not so anyone simulate by the merry way ponder!"

There was a completely deadening silence in the large room. Dr. Mitchell leaned over to her, his face an apoplectic red.

"Katherine! Dr. Baxter! Whatever are you talking about?"

"Please, Dr. Mitchell," she whispered, "I'm just achieving a major point. Wait till the question period, and we can correlate all the inquiries."

He sat back reluctant and confused. A vague murmur started to rise from the audience.

"And so," she continued speaking, "the thermo e.m.f. will presently kernel the flux of the ingress dogmatic. . . . It paradoxically be that I gathered to collision a transmissivity expansion, and it was wove."

Suddenly the eminent Dr. Baxter hiccupped. Loudly, the sound of it bounced over the tables like an errant ping-pong ball. She crimsoned slightly, but recovered quickly and finished.

"Therefore, when I came to experiment number 1276 I realized that theoretically the merger of these two elements was possible after all."

Dr. Mitchell sighed with deep bewildered relief and managed a weak smile to the audience. Katherine continued.

"From there I went on with renewed effort, and finally with my 2003rd experiment I compounded Flotnium, in the form in which it exists today."

Flustered by the oppressive silence, she turned hesitantly and extended her hand to the embarrassed Mitchell. He took it automatically, but his grasp was less hearty than it might have been.

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Frankly puzzled, she turned back to her audience, glanced hurriedly at the stunned faces . . . and abruptly sat down.

And still there was no applause.

Research 3 lay dappled in the late afternoon sunlight. The animated galactic displays, silenced for the day, dwarfed the study tables below them. Only a subdued hum emanating from one of the machines broke the airy quietness; for classes were over for the day, and the children had long since gone to the recreation areas.

Miss Trece, walking quickly down the corridor outside, looked up just in time to see a figure disappearing down an adjacent hallway.

"Oh, Barth! Just a moment," she cried.

Barth tucked his papers under his arm and waited for her.

"I know you must be in a hurry, Mr. Barth. But I wanted to ask if you'd seen little Maura Thalen."

"Why no, I haven't," he answered. "I've been correcting papers over in Research 7 until just a minute ago."

Barth gestured back over his shoulder. "That reminds me; I noticed the power panel outside Research 3 was on when I came by. Thought maybe you were still inside working."

"No, I'd checked the children out of there last period . . ." Eone Trece ran her hand worriedly through her hair. "You say the panel is on? Well, I'd better see what it is."

"Good lord!" Barth looked at his wrist watch. "I've got to run. But I'll look in on my way back."

Sure enough, the panel was on. She opened the door and went in.

Something was drawing current, but she was sure that she'd checked everything before leaving. Nevertheless, there was a hum permeating the room; and it seemed to come from the further corner, over by the window.

Then it was that she noticed the warning light on the large machine that sat beside her desk.

"Hmmm!"

The sound escaped her lips speculatively. She walked quickly over and checked the timer dial.

It had another 52 or 53 seconds to go.

There was nothing to do but wait. In fact, under the circumstances, it was the best thing to do. She settled herself on the edge of the desk.

"Hey!" Barth hollered from the door. "What did you find, if anything?"

"Come on in." She pointed to the panel. "Take a look!"

"Oh ho!" he chuckled. "I see. I suppose you do have a faint idea who's using it."

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"Well, we'll soon find out for sure . . ." Eone was interrupted by the red light flashing off. She and Barth turned towards the machine.

The door slid back. Maura pushed a strand of hair back from over her eyes and stepped out. She turned to snap the current off, and saw the two instructors coolly appraising her.

"Oh, Miss Trece! You startled me. . . . Were you looking for me?"

"Well yes, I was, Maura," Eone answered, disarmingly casual. "But, frankly, I didn't expect to find you here!"

"But I was out walking for a while. . . ."

Eone broke in, changing her manner suddenly. "The point is, Maura, that you've been caught time-hopping! You know that you've been forbidden to use this machine for anything but supervised field trips. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Well, as I said . . . I was out walking, and," Maura tried to explain, "and . . . I just got to thinking about my . . . thesis, and I just felt that I had to go back and re-check my findings. I just wasn't satis. . . ."

"Is something the matter, dear?" asked Eone, suddenly gentle.

Maura's eyes widened into an ingenuous stare. Uneasy, Barth turned to look over his shoulder. There was nothing there — nothing but the darkening windows as the sun sank lower and lower.

"Why, no! There's nothing wrong!" Maura answered abruptly, jerking his attention back by the inconceivably alien tone she'd adopted.

"There's nothing wrong except that I've just about violated every rule there is in the time-travel code." The words ran together and separated irrepressibly. "I wasn't out walking, any of the times before, when you wondered where I was. I was time-hopping every time; and on every trip I behaved abominably. . . . I just about wrecked several lives. And I'm so ashamed of myself, especially because of the woman scientist . . ."

The animatedness fell off, and a puzzled expression worried her eyes.

"Did I, Miss Trece?" she demanded. "Did I just say that I was ashamed of myself? Did I say that, Miss Trece, or did I just imagine I heard myself saying it?" Her eyes were on the borderline of tears, but she was trying desperately to hold them back; not quite knowing why they were there.

Eone nudged Barth's shoe. His half-smile vanished.

"You were just telling us, dear," she answered, "what a perfect little idiot you'd been making of yourself. Now, let's finish about the woman scientist you — uh — visited."

"Oh dear," Maura objected, "did I mention that, too?"

"Yes Maura, you did," Eone replied. "And you were quite voluble about it, too; even though it was by proxy. Maybe you can tell us now, just how it feels to be taken over by a playful time-traveler?"

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Of all the many authors whose first stories we've published, we feel a particularly marked confidence in the future professional career of Mildred Clingerman. So convinced indeed are we that we had bought her third story before publishing her first; and that first (Minister Without Portfolio, *F&SF, January, 1952*) *not only proved one of the most popular stories in an issue unusually rich in Big Names, but was chosen before publication for inclusion in Groff Conklin's latest anthology,* INVADERS OF EARTH (*see this month's* Recommended Reading). *Mrs. Clingerman is a writer as versatile as she is admirable; this second story, we warn you, has nothing in common with the first . . . save the ever-welcome factors of originality, warmth and a fine understanding of people.*

Stair Trick

by MILDRED CLINGERMAN

DAY after day the bartender did his fool's routine of a man going down stairs. The regular customers loved it. Of course there weren't any stairs, but sooner or later somebody would call down the long length of bar, "Dick, old boy, I'd like a bottle of that Chateau Margaux '29 to take home to the wife. How about it?"

After twenty years of it, Dick could recognize his cue. "Certainly, sir," he'd say gravely. "It won't take me a minute. You'll excuse me while I step down to the cellar?"

The regulars would grin and nudge the newcomers, the uninitiated. "Watch it," they'd say. "Just watch this." And the newcomers would set their faces in accommodating lines tinged with the resentment of those who aren't in on the joke, and watch Dick carefully. Dick, his bald head gleaming in the overhead light, would start his stately descent into the cellar, until, step by step, the bald head had disappeared from view.

"What's so hot about that?" Nine times out of ten some disgruntled stranger would challenge the regulars. "Hell, I can still walk down a few stairs."

"Just wait. Just wait and *listen*." Gleefully the regulars would shush the unimpressed stranger until reluctantly he subsided and listened.

Nobody knew, or cared to inquire too closely, just what it was Dick had

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rigged under the bar for his sound effects, but they were good. One heard the rattle of a chain lock, the squeak of the heavy door at the foot of the steps, a clicking light switch, and then the stone-muffled tramp, tramp of Dick's feet to the wine racks. Some hesitation then followed while the customers imagined Dick selecting the wine asked for, then they heard him crossing the stone floor. They heard again the click of the light switch and the door closing behind him with a hollow booming sound, the rattle of the lock, and Dick (a heavy man) was climbing the stairs, puffing a little. As he gradually came into view, one often saw a wisp of cobweb trailing across the bald head, and in his arms he cradled a dusty bottle. The bottle was always the same, but the puzzled stranger didn't know that.

"Now!" the regulars would shout. "Look! Look!" Everybody would raise himself from his bar stool to peer over the bar, pointing at Dick's feet and the floor he stood on, the stranger along with the rest. It was always a pleasure to watch the stranger's face as he took in the solid cement floor that showed through the slatted walkway running unbroken behind the bar. The grin breaking on the newcomer's face always started out a little sickly, but as light dawned and the illusion faded, the usual verdict was, "I'll be damned." And everybody was happy.

"Let's see what you got in the bottle" . . . but the regulars were quick to explain, low-voiced, that Dick was funny about the bottle. It was just an old empty bottle, but Dick didn't go handing it around. If you wanted to get snubbed, try making a grab for it.

•

Dick, as always after he'd finished the stair trick, just stood there for a while, holding the empty bottle, and anybody looking at him would have been surprised at the expression on his face. Nobody really looks at a bartender. The man behind the bar is either a smile or a mild grouch, and in any case, a pair of willing hands — reaching, setting down, polishing, ringing the cash register. Even the bar philosophers (the dreariest customers of all) prefer to study their own faces in the backbar mirror. And however they accept their reflected images, whether shudderingly or with secret love, it is to this aloof image that they impart their whiskey-wisdom, not to the bartender. Dick knew that. For twenty years he had watched his customers with growing bewilderment. His small, kind eyes assessed his world, and found it very lonely.

Occasionally Dick, too, took note of his own face in the backbar mirror, but most of all he used the mirror for watching The Game. The Game went on and on, year in and year out, but Dick never tired of watching it. Just as the customers smiled and narrowed their eyes at his stair trick, wanting to believe, so too did he take in all the nuances of The Game, and even

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after twenty years of it he kept on wanting to believe. Nightly he assured himself that people do fall in love in bars . . . well, anyway, that one couple . . . Maybe. He hoped so.

Dick was almost used to the loneliness of his room in the musty old hotel. Every night when he unlocked his door he found the steaming foot bath waiting. How many bellboys had he trained to that attention? Too many, perhaps. . . . Oh, well, there was the evening paper on the arm of the shabby easy chair, and the slippers waiting for his feet to emerge from the good hot water. A wife now . . . might remember he liked hot tea waiting, too, but then again she might not relish such tasks around 1:00 A.M. And, anyway, what was the use of wondering about that? It certainly wasn't very likely at this point that Dick would ever marry. Marriage happened to other men. Well, didn't it? He would gladly have married if the chance had ever . . . happened. How else did you get married? Nobody sets forth with the thought: I'm going to find somebody, *today*, for instance, and get myself married. No, it wasn't that way at all.

First, somebody catches your eye. You look at each other, past the mask, beyond all the things life does to cover people up, hide them, and your eyes meet in a far place that's familiar to each of you. And that's a frightening thing. That's the beginning of The Game, and the fear is part of the fascination. The Game is really just hide and seek, until neither can bear to hide any longer. But you can't play The Game until you meet the right pair of eyes. Now, can you?

Dick had looked into a lot of eyes, but none had been right. He had watched hundreds of people experience that shock of recognition, though. That's how he knew so much about it. Well, admit it. . . . He'd also seen it assumed, counterfeited. He'd watched the Hunters of both sexes mark their prey. Usually they avoided their own kind, but sometimes, like jungle beasts meeting on a narrow path, they challenged each other. Then it was a battle to the death. Whenever this happened in Dick's bar, he could almost feel the charged atmosphere. You could see that it affected the customers, too. The laughter grew louder, the drinks went down quicker, and quarrels sprang up in the room like little fires. A good time for the stair trick . . . it helped to clear the air.

This night Dick had gone through the routine and was still puffing from his exertions, just standing there, holding the empty bottle with that strange look on his face, when somebody down at the end of the bar called to him in a high, clear voice:

"Tell me, bartender, what's it like in the cellar?"

Dick turned slowly towards the voice and his hands shook so much he was afraid he'd drop the bottle. Nobody else had ever asked that question.

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Laughter and head-shaking admiration were supposed to be the end of it. This woman, now . . . She only came around once or twice a month. How did she know the cellar was . . . very real to Dick? He hurried to set the empty bottle before her so that she could examine it — the emptiness of it, the carefully preserved dust and cobwebs.

"The cellar. . . ." Dick said. "It's nice."

She lifted her look to his. "I know," she said.

Their eyes met in the far place, and yet Dick trembled with unbelief. She was a Hunter, and Hunters were clever enough to find your far place, or to pretend they had.

"You're a liar," Dick whispered. "You don't really know."

The woman tucked a dark lock of hair behind her ear and smiled at him. "Don't believe me," she said. "Forget it. I'm just tight. But . . . tell me, in your cellar . . . have you found the door to the other side?"

"I don't know what you mean." Dick moistened his dry lips and glanced up and down the bar and out to the crowded tables. The customers were engrossed in their own talk, their glasses almost full.

The woman sighed and shook her head at him gently. "You're afraid," she said. "You know what I am, and now — this minute — I'm drunk enough to admit it. Also drunk enough and crazy enough to try to find the way out . . . You know you can't go through the door alone? Even if you find it?"

Dick looked long at her before he nodded his head. Yes, he knew. And here, at last, was the woman, if only he could believe in her.

"Aren't you lonely, too?" the woman asked softly. "Don't you want me? I'd be different beyond the door. . . . What do you think I've been hunting for, all these years?"

"Why didn't you speak sooner?" Dick whispered. "Years ago . . ."

"You wouldn't look at me," she said. "You'd never really look at me."

That was true. He was afraid of the Hunters, and most afraid of the few quiet, lovely women who did not look the part. Like this one.

"I can't believe it," he said. "You don't want me." He shook his head dazedly.

The woman tried to smile. "All right," she said. "I was crazy to think you'd listen, that you'd believe. . . . I don't blame you. And now the hell with it, I don't believe in anything at all." She slid down from the high bar stood and turned to walk away.

"Wait."

For a moment she hesitated, then turned again to face him. He looked at her soft red mouth and the cloud of dark hair, and at the slender, sweet body before he allowed himself to look again into her eyes. She faced him

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as if he were Judgment, and she standing up pleading for mankind. Her eyes admitted everything. The meanness, the drab cheating, all the higgling subterfuges, the hurt, the fear, and yes . . . the love, to balance them all — to write them all off.

"Come with me now," he said.

Quickly then she ducked under the hinged serving board and was beside him on the slatted walkway behind the bar. He took her hand and smiled at her and together they went down the stairs.

There was the old bottle standing on the bar — that was the first thing noticed. Then somebody heard the creaking of the door. Somebody else heard it chained and locked again from the other side; and as sounds died in the room, almost everybody in the bar heard the muffled steps of the two of them crossing the stone floor. But they didn't stop at the wine racks. The regulars will tell you that. They went beyond — far beyond — any point Dick had ever reached alone. Until at last the footsteps ceased — brought up short it seemed before the last barrier. And then there was time enough and silence enough for every man in the bar to remember blank closed doors and the sour taste of failure.

The sighing had already begun — the thin, stingy *ahhh* for this latest defeat — when they heard the sound that was new and triumphant. Not one of the customers will swear it was music he heard, but every last one of them swears he heard Dick open the door to the Other Side . . . and close it again behind him.

Note on a Grave Situation

If she had not been cupric
In her ions; her shape, ovoidal,
Their romance might have flourished;

But he, built tetrahedral
In his shape,
His ions ferric,

Love could not help but die,
Uncatalized, inert,
And undernourished.

— Leonard Wolf

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

As IT MUST to all reviewers, the time has come for us to confess ourselves wrong. We have vehemently argued that another original anthology of science fiction shorts simply could not be assembled. We have insisted there just aren't enough worthwhile stories; all collections scheduled for 1952 publication would consist of: a), a poor lot of stories, of no permanent value whatsoever; or b), a rehash of previously anthologized stories. But it seems that we went out on this limb only to have Messrs. Heinlein, Conklin, Pohl and Gold saw it out from under us! They managed our downfall by the no means easy feat of producing tasteful selections of newly anthologized material that are both splendid entertainment and valid cross-sections of the best of contemporary science fiction. We said it couldn't be done; it *was* done and we're happy to apologize to them and to you. (However, still stubborn, we wonder if the twenty-odd anthos yet to be published this year will come close to meeting the standards set by these four editors.)

Robert A. Heinlein proves himself nearly as capable an editor as he is a writer with his first anthology, TOMORROW THE STARS (Doubleday). The fourteen stories, all new to book publication, have been chosen from all possible sources and are uniformly excellent. But, for us, the best reading in the book is Heinlein's introduction, an unassuming, yet keenly perceptive discussion of just what constitutes science fiction. Writers and critics of the field should study these remarks carefully before writing another word on the subject.

Heinlein expresses deep gratitude for the help of several co-editors, including among others, Judith Merril and Frederik Pohl. Pohl has done a nice job on his own with BEYOND THE END OF TIME (Permabooks). Among other achievements, this well-rounded collection strikes a stout blow at inflation in offering nineteen stories for 35 cents.

Groff Conklin is now engaged in the likeable project of "pattern" anthologies, collections that illustrate a basic theme of science fiction. It's a difficult task but so far Conklin has succeeded admirably. His newest, INVADERS OF EARTH (Vanguard), contains twenty-one stories that concern themselves with all sorts of possible intruders on our planet. Also present is that famed radio play of Howard Koch's, INVASION FROM MARS, with which Orson Welles terrorized the citizenry a few years back. The notes

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and introduction are a substantial contribution to the book's over-all value.

Last in the array of good anthologies, but by no means least, especially as regards quantity, is H. L. Gold's selection of what he considers the best stories he has published, GALAXY READER OF SCIENCE FICTION (Crown). Since no two readers, let alone editors, ever agree on what is a "best" story, we're sure that Mr. Gold will tolerantly accept our arguing with some of his choices. On the whole, however, this big (almost too big?) book offers a generous sampling of "Galaxy" publishing.

Out of a half-dozen science fiction novels published to date, only one can be offered to you as "recommended reading." That is James Blish's JACK OF EAGLES (Greenberg), a book that is both extraordinarily good and curiously bad. It is one of the strongest pieces of real *science* fiction to be published in years. Those who glibly label as science fiction what is, after all, pure fantasy would do well to study the thinking and logic behind Blish's postulation of the development of psi powers, ESP, psycho-kinesis and kindred potentials of the human mind. Yet, plotwise his novel is tritely melodramatic, wholly devoid of characterization and rather flatly written. But we think it is to be strongly recommended, not only for its thinking, but for its brilliant understanding of the essential problem behind the superman thesis, the necessity of integrating superman with humanity.

The first collection of A. E. van Vogt's science fiction short stories, DESTINATION: UNIVERSE! (Pellegrini & Cudahy), is in two different senses more readable than most recent books in the field; it is attractively designed (if expensive and badly proofread) as a book rather than as a mass of wordage, and each of the ten tales combines startling concepts with convincing small-scale development and pure adventurous story-value in a manner notably lacking in many "vaster" efforts (including some of the author's own longer works). Only six of the ten are new to book form, and the pretentious auto-analytical introduction is hardly an ornament; but the volume is still an outstanding collection of imaginative fiction, vigorous, believable and (one of the rarest of all virtues in current science fiction) economical.

Another fine specimen of early van Vogt story-telling has just been republished: the 1943 novel THE WEAPON MAKERS (Greenberg). First printed in hard covers in a minute edition six years ago, this has been one of the scarcest books in the science fiction field; now readers without a collector's purse can again read a grand fantasy-melodrama of the remote future (and perhaps wonder whether its noble imaginative adventure has anything to do with *science* fiction). Other reissues include Karel Čapek's difficult and uneven, but at its best strangely compelling 1924 fantasy of atomic power, KRAKATIT (Arts, Inc.); two good specimens of the solid pulp craftsmanship of the pre-Dianetic L. Ron Hubbard — *Death's Deputy* (along with some

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third-rate Hubbard filler material) in FROM DEATH TO THE STARS and *Triton* (together with some subprintable stuff by Edd Earl Repp) in SCIENCE-FANTASY QUINTETTE (both FPCI); and the best bargain current for those who missed the first editions: the two first volumes (1949 and 1950) of Bleiler and Dikty's admirable BEST annuals combined in one under the title of SCIENCE FICTION OMNIBUS (Garden City).

A number of recent general volumes of short fiction have contained a few fantasy stories, often of high quality. Maurice Walsh's SON OF A TINKER (Lippincott) is a grand session of romantic Irish story-telling, with one distinguished supernatural novelet, *My Fey Lady*. In TALES OF THE TWO BORDERS (Bobbs-Merrill), Walter O'Meara offers unhackneyed French-Canadian and Mexican-American backgrounds to rather conventional fantasy concepts; and in THE ARM OF MRS. EGAN (Dutton), the late William Fryer Harvey varies a volume of detective stories with an occasional quietly underplayed psychic chiller — effective, if never quite up to his classic *August Heat*. The most strikingly individual talent in this group is that of the Portuguese writer Miguel Torga, whose FARRUSCO THE BLACKBIRD, published in a singularly beautiful edition by Golden Griffin Books (Arts, Inc.), consists chiefly of subtle offtrail studies in animal psychology, plus two unusual and moving biblical apocrypha.

A non-fiction treasure for every fantasy enthusiast is CHIVERS' LIFE OF POE, edited by Richard Beale Davis (Dutton). This is the first edition, from long-neglected manuscripts in the Huntington Library, of significant first-hand material by Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers, who, as the editor justly notes, "came as close as any of Poe's contemporaries to understanding him" (and who is, in his own right, one of the most fascinating and underrated figures in American literary history). The value of Chivers' observations, the outrageous wonder of his style, the meticulously scholarly editing of Dr. Davis, and Dutton's superb job of bookmaking combine to mark this as the year's outstanding collectors' item. Readers are indebted to the same firm for a completely different but equally valuable book: HAUNTED PEOPLE, by Hereward Carrington and Nandor Fodor (Dutton) — a notable omnibus account of all historic cases of poltergeists and allied phenomena, including many absorbingly detailed case-histories, with a unique and provocative application of psychiatric method to the study of "the supernatural" . . . possibly the first time that "psychic research" has been treated in terms which a science fiction reader will find convincing.

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"The short story," Graham Greene writes in his latest collection (NINETEEN STORIES; *Viking, 1949*), *"is an exacting form which I have never properly practised; I present these tales merely as the by-products of a novelist's career." In many of the nineteen, this truth is all too evident; but in a few Greene has hit upon a perfect theme for short fiction and developed it as a skilled literary artist, whether or not he is practised in that particular form. Perhaps the most successful of these is* Proof Positive, *written in 1930 — a unique supernatural concept (and one markedly at variance with the theology of Greene's most recent novels), treated with such haunting simplicity that one wishes his eminent novelistic career might only proffer more such by-products.*

Proof Positive

by GRAHAM GREENE

THE TIRED voice went on. It seemed to surmount enormous obstacles to speech. The man's sick, Colonel Crashaw thought with pity and irritation. When a young man he had climbed in the Himalayas, and he remembered how at great heights several breaths had to be taken for every step advanced. The five-foot-high platform in the Music Rooms of The Spa seemed to entail for the speaker some of the same effort. He should never have come out on such a raw afternoon, thought Colonel Crashaw, pouring out a glass of water and pushing it across the lecturer's table. The rooms were badly heated, and yellow fingers of winter fog felt for cracks in the many windows. There was little doubt that the speaker had lost all touch with his audience. It was scattered in patches about the hall — elderly ladies who made no attempt to hide their cruel boredom, and a few men, with the appearance of retired officers, who put up a show of attention.

Colonel Crashaw, as president of the local Psychical Society, had received a note from the speaker a little more than a week before. Written by a hand which trembled with sickness, age or drunkenness, it asked urgently for a special meeting of the society. An extraordinary, a really impressive, experience was to be described while still fresh in the mind, though what the

From the book NINETEEN STORIES. *Copyright, 1947, by Graham Greene; reprinted by arrangement with The Viking Press; originally published in Harper's Magazine*

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experience had been was left vague. Colonel Crashaw would have hesitated to comply if the note had not been signed by a Major Philip Weaver, Indian Army, retired. One had to do what one could for a brother officer; the trembling of the hand must be either age or sickness.

It proved principally to be the latter when the two men met for the first time on the platform. Major Weaver was not more than sixty, tall, thin, and dark, with an ugly obstinate nose and satire in his eye, the most unlikely person to experience anything unexplainable. What antagonized Crashaw most was that Weaver used scent; a white handkerchief which drooped from his breast pocket exhaled as rich and sweet an odor as a whole altar of lilies. Several ladies prinked their noses, and General Leadbitter asked loudly whether he might smoke.

It was quite obvious that Weaver understood. He smiled provocatively and asked very slowly, "Would you mind not smoking? My throat has been bad for some time." Crashaw murmured that it was terrible weather; influenza throats were common. The satirical eye came round to him and considered him thoughtfully, while Weaver said in a voice which carried half-way across the hall, "It's cancer in my case."

In the shocked vexed silence that followed the unnecessary intimacy he began to speak without waiting for any introduction from Crashaw. He seemed at first to be in a hurry. It was only later that the terrible impediments were placed in the way of his speech. He had a high voice, which sometimes broke into a squeal, and must have been peculiarly disagreeable on the parade ground. He paid a few compliments to the local society; his remarks were just sufficiently exaggerated to be irritating. He was glad, he said, to give them the chance of hearing him; what he had to say might alter their whole view of the relative values of matter and spirit.

Mystic stuff, thought Crashaw.

Weaver's high voice began to shoot out hurried platitudes. The spirit, he said, was stronger than anyone realized; the physiological action of heart and brain and nerves were subordinate to the spirit. The spirit was everything. He said again, his voice squeaking up like bats into the ceiling, "The spirit is so much stronger than you think." He put his hand across his throat and squinted sideways at the window-panes and the nuzzling fog, and upwards at the bare electric globe sizzling with heat and poor light in the dim afternoon. "It's immortal," he told them very seriously, and they shifted, restless, uncomfortable, and weary, in their chairs.

It was then that his voice grew tired and his speech impeded. The knowledge that he had entirely lost touch with his audience may have been the cause. An elderly lady at the back had taken her knitting from a bag, and her needles flashed along the walls when the light caught them, like a bright

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ironic spirit. Satire for a moment deserted Weaver's eyes, and Crashaw saw the vacancy it left, as though the ball had turned to glass.

"This is important," the lecturer cried to them. "I can tell you a story —" His audience's attention was momentarily caught by this promise of something definite, but the stillness of the lady's needles did not soothe him. He sneered at them all. "Signs and wonders," he said.

Then he lost the thread of his speech altogether.

His hand passed to and fro across his throat and he quoted Shakespeare, and then St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. His speech, as it grew slower, seemed to lose all logical order, though now and then Crashaw was surprised by the shrewdness in the juxtaposition of two irrelevant ideas. It was like the conversation of an old man which flits from subject to subject, the thread a subconscious one. "When I was at Simla," he said, bending his brows as though to avoid the sunflash on the barrack square, but perhaps the frost, the fog, the tarnished room, broke his memories. He began to assure the wearied faces all over again that the spirit did not die when the body died, but that the body only moved at the spirit's will. One had to be obstinate, to grapple . . .

Pathetic, Crashaw thought, the sick man's clinging to his belief. It was as if life were an only son who was dying and with whom he wished to preserve some form of communication. . . .

A note was passed to Crashaw from the audience. It came from a Dr. Brown, a small alert man in the third row; the society cherished him as a kind of pet sceptic. The note read: "Can't you make him stop? The man's obviously very ill. And what good is his talk, anyway?"

Crashaw turned his eyes sideways and upwards and felt his pity vanish at the sight of the roving satirical eyes that gave the lie to the tongue, and at the smell, overpoweringly sweet, of the scent in which Weaver had steeped his handkerchief. The man was an "outsider"; he would look up his record in the old Army Lists when he got home.

"Proof positive," Weaver was saying, sighing a shrill breath of exhaustion between the words. Crashaw laid his watch upon the table, but Weaver paid him no attention. He was supporting himself on the rim of the table with one hand. "I'll give you," he said, speaking with increasing difficulty, "proof pos . . ." His voice scraped into stillness, like a needle at a record's end, but the quiet did not last. From an expressionless face, a sound which was more like a high mew than anything else jerked the audience into attention. He followed it up, still without a trace of any emotion or understanding, with a succession of incomprehensible sounds, a low labial whispering, an odd jangling note, while his fingers tapped on the table. The sounds brought to mind innumerable séances, the bound medium, the

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tambourine shaken in mid-air, the whispered trivialities of loved ghosts in the darkness, the dinginess, the airless rooms.

Weaver sat down slowly in his chair and let his head fall backwards. An old lady began to cry nervously, and Dr. Brown scrambled on to the platform and bent over him. Colonel Crashaw saw the doctor's hand tremble as he picked the handkerchief from the pocket and flung it away from him. Crashaw, aware of another and more unpleasant smell, heard Dr. Brown whisper: "Send them all away. He's dead."

He spoke with a distress unusual in a doctor accustomed to every kind of death. Crashaw, before he complied, glanced over Dr. Brown's shoulder at the dead man. Major Weaver's appearance disquieted him. In a long life he had seen many forms of death, men shot by their own hand, and men killed in the field, but never such a suggestion of mortality. The body might have been one fished from the sea a long while after death; the flesh of the face seemed as ready to fall as an overripe fruit. So it was with no great shock of surprise that he heard Dr. Brown's whispered statement, "The man must have been dead a week."

What the Colonel thought of most was Weaver's claim — "Proof positive" — proof, he had probably meant, that the spirit outlived the body, that it tasted eternity. But all he had certainly revealed was how, without the body's aid, the spirit in seven days decayed into whispered nonsense.

Note:

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We know few authors, even among our highest fantasy favorites, who can compare with Alan Nelson in sheer memorability. If you read, in this magazine, Cattivo *or* Narapoia, *or in anthologies* Professor Pfaff's Last Recital *or* Man in a Hurry, *you'll understand what we mean. A "typical" Nelson story is completely atypical — an idea that no one else could conceive, developed with such inevitable rightness as to become literally unforgettable. Only Nelson could have imagined such a musical instrument as the Gualcophone, or handled so strange a theme with such haunting tenderness.*

The Gualcophone

by ALAN NELSON

A STRANGE and beautiful instrument, the Gualcophone. You didn't play on it; *it* played on you — and in the beginning I had great hopes it might bring humans very close to one another. The trouble was, it worked too well.

Its inventor, Arthur Gualco, came to me almost two years ago seeking employment. You've probably heard of us here — the Heinkle Music Works manufactures only special custom built instruments, you know. The special piano keyboard for Krudeneau's oversize fingers; the left handed violins; the flute with double set of finger holes so one man might play duets; and so on. This little drum here I've been tapping, for example. Like the tone? Ever hear anything that reminded you more of a heart beat? It's made of . . . but then I was telling you of Arthur Gualco.

I was in the violin section that day when my daughter Evelyn who helps with the office work told me he was upstairs. I couldn't place the name at first; then I remembered. Two weeks previously I had received a strange letter from my friend Dr. Blauren. Here, I'll read it:

Dear Mr. Heinkle:

I am taking the liberty of referring to you a patient of mine it might be to your mutual benefit to know — Arthur Gualco.

Gualco has a condition known as hyperacusia; an abnormally acute sense of hearing and painful sensitiveness to sound.

Know how a safecracker is supposed to sandpaper his finger tips

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to make them sensitive to falling tumblers? Gualco was born with every nerve ending in his body "sandpapered" to this sensitivity. A pin falling on a hardwood floor is like a crowbar dropping on steel. He can hear the heartbeat of anyone in the same room. He hears the blood circulating in his own ear. Ordinary pillows keep him awake at night due to the crunching of the cotton batting when he moves his head.

When he was a child, Gualco's parents, baffled by his nervous irritability, moved from climate to climate. Nothing helped, of course, except isolation. When he was nine, he complained of hearing voices. In desperation the parents then brought him to me.

"What do the voices say?" I asked.

"Different things at different times," he answered.

"What are they saying now?"

"They are saying E, R, Y, C, Z, O."

For a moment I was puzzled. Then not believing it possible, I went immediately to the office next door — an optician's office. A man was reading an eye chart; Gualco repeated his responses as he heard them through the plaster wall.

Once Gualco's condition was diagnosed, it was easier to work out a way of life for him. He must, of course, lead a cloistered existence, for noise is pure pain.

For ten years he has been feverishly working on a strange musical instrument of his own design. Now he is completely out of funds to continue his project. He needs special tools and equipment. Possibly you can employ his talents in your shop.

Cordially,

A. J. Blauren, M.D.

When I pushed the door of my office open that day he was sitting by the phonograph, his arm draped over a silently spinning record. He arose and walked toward me. The door behind me slammed shut. A painful shudder passed through his body.

"Sorry," I said with embarrassment.

"No harm," he said in a soft low voice. Then gesturing toward the phonograph, he said: "Your daughter said I might play it."

I studied him a moment. I had been expecting a freak. But my first impression — my only impression — was that here stood a man of tremendous spiritual depth. He was tall and straight with gaunt hungry features, and his eyes, as though in constant retreat from noise, were deep and brooding. He had an absorbed air — of being perpetually poised for detecting some distant sound.

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Gualco fumbled with a small ear mechanism that looked like a hearing aid.

"Sound diminisher," he explained.

"I have Dr. Blauren's letter, Mr. Gualco," I began hesitantly. "I'd like to help you but I'm afraid it's . . ."

The hunger in his eyes stopped me.

"I want no pay, Mr. Heinkle," he said. "I'll work for you eight, ten, twelve hours a day. All I ask is a soundproof corner to work and sleep in, enough to eat, and an opportunity to work on one of my own instruments after hours."

I frowned. The whole thing was screwy — hyperacusia, soundproof corners, mysterious instruments. Yet if he wanted to work here for eats, what could I lose?

"Know anything about violins?"

He smiled and nodded and I felt as if I'd asked a sea captain if he'd ever seen the ocean. I left him and went downstairs to check with my violin man, Charlie. When I returned, I found Gualco by the phonograph again, his arm resting in the same odd position over the record which still spun soundlessly.

"I think I can use you. Come on, I'll show you around."

Half way out, I returned to turn off the phonograph. The needle arm had never been removed from its original resting spot.

"You didn't play the record after all?"

"Yes," he said. "But I have my own way. For me, the usual manner is much too loud. My way, the music becomes almost a part of me."

He held out his left hand. The fingernail on the fourth finger was long and tapered to needle sharpness.

"I use this," he said.

Well, we fixed him up a soundproof little room on the south end with a work bench, cot, chairs, gas burner and windows all around, and in two weeks I knew I hadn't made any mistake in hiring him.

"What kind of violin would you like first?"he asked me the very first day. "Happy? Contemplative? Somber?"

"Happy," I replied vaguely, not knowing what he was talking about. Later, I watched him lift strips of wood to his ear and gently stroke them one by one with his finger tips.

"All wood has different emotional tones," he explained. "For a gay violin I must have gay wood."

I walked away certain at the moment I'd hired a madman, but left him alone. A good thing. Two weeks later he handed me the completed violin.

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Ever heard of Mostrovitz? Mostrovitz and his Smiling Violin is the disgusting way they bill him, I think. He *is* a good violinist. But you don't think those joyful, rejoicing tones come from the *way* he plays, do you? It's the violin, my friend — made right in there.

What strange project is Gualco working on after shop hours?

I asked myself this question a thousand times in the weeks that followed. Shipments of rare woods, curious metal devices, strange gums and resins began to arrive. The horn of an Asiatic ibex. Transparent membranes sealed in wax pouches. He left his soundproof quarters only occasionally; most of the time he hunched over his bench, forever reshaping endless wire coils and parchment tubing. Even Evelyn who sat for long periods quietly conversing with him didn't know.

Everyone liked Gualco except Jock Lippitt, my shop foreman, a cocky little rooster with a red face and gravelly voice, whose jealousy of Gualco's strange talents erupted every once in a while.

"Must be feeding time for 'Ears,' " he'd say every noon, while the other workers laughed nervously. "Crack him up a couple of phonograph records and toss 'em in his cage, will you?"

One day he headed for Gualco's quarters with a sardonic smile on his face and a drum under each arm.

"They tell me you have a sharp ear,' he said to Gualco hunched over his bench. "Tell me, my friend, which of these drums comes closer to C sharp. This one?" Here Lippitt, sticks flashing, clattered out a piercing staccato. "Or this one!" And he cudgelled the other drum with equal ferocity.

Gualco recoiled against the wall as if he'd been kicked in the solar plexus with an iron boot. He writhed in pain, finally gathered himself and advanced on the foreman with deadly determination. Lippitt stood his ground a moment, then flinched and tried to back away.

"Why does your heart beat so loud, little man?" Gualco asked coldly. "Are you afraid?"

Then seizing Lippitt by the back of his collar, he carried him the length of the shop and deposited him flailing on a work bench. While everyone stared in amazement, Gualco picked up a chisel and thrust it through the first drum.

"This one is a quarter tone below C sharp," he said. "And this one," thrusting two chisels through it, "this one is almost a dead A flat. I hope that answers your question."

The chisels rocked gently in the punctured membranes as Gualco returned to his room and closed the door softly, and collapsed.

Gualco languished for three days, weak and white-faced after that vio-

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lent exposure while Evelyn and I fed him hot soup and applied cold towels to his forehead.

"Noise poisoning," he said weakly. "I'll be all right in a few days."

I was furious at Lippitt and wanted to fire him on the spot, but Gualco wouldn't let me.

"You mustn't," he pleaded. "The little man's not vicious — he's afraid. He suffers more than I do — I can hear it. Don't worry. There won't be any more trouble."

And there wasn't.

Do I make Gualco sound like a freak — a man with an obscure sensory abnormality and a weakness for tinkering? He was not a freak — believe me. There was something about the man — spiritual is the only way I can describe it. I asked Evelyn about it one day several months after the episode with Lippitt. Evelyn is young but her intuition is as old as the world.

"You spend a great deal of time with him — do you find him strange?"

"Strange? Different perhaps, but not strange."

"Nor do I," I admitted. "I wonder why?"

Evelyn was silent a moment.

"No one is strange who has overcome a personal handicap — the very process of overcoming it must do something to you inside. Somehow you seem to draw strength from the weakness itself."

This was a long speech for Evelyn; I studied her sensitive, brooding features and smiled.

"You love him?"

She fingered a strand of her long black hair, the way she always does when she's embarrassed.

"Yes," she said.

I was full of questions that day and later in the afternoon had the opportunity of asking Gualco himself a few.

"What do you do about the noise you cannot control? The sudden, unexpected blasts? Guns firing? The crash of autos? Shouts? Thunder?"

"It's impossible to shut out the noises of the world completely, of course," he said, "and to me each blast is a body blow. But everyone receives a certain number of body blows in the course of a lifetime. I do what you do — accept them and go on living."

"But what pleasure do you *get* out of living — isolated from everyone in a soundproof box like that?"

"Everyone is isolated," he answered. "Some more than others."

"Isolated?"

"Haven't you often experienced the complete futility of truly communi-

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cating with others — even some one very close to you? Haven't you felt the terrifying frustration of not understanding — of not being understood? There are almost a million words in the English language and yet even this number is not enough to pierce the invisible brick wall that isolates each from the other."

"But your isolation is almost complete."

"It is my one purpose in living," he said slowly, "that someday I may not be. Someday, maybe no one will be."

It was over a year later that Gualco came into my office one morning and I knew instantly something important had happened. His eyes glowed with exhilaration. The smile refused to be erased as though the corners of his mouth were attached with invisible rubber bands to his ears, snapping his lips into a grin everytime he tried to look serious.

"I've finished it," he said softly.

I followed him down the steps, across the shop and into his work room. Evelyn was inside, as excited as Gualco. He pointed to the bench.

"There it is."

Well, it looked something like a French horn with all the shiny metal tubing curling about itself, and the flaring bell at the end. But here the similarity stopped. In the center of these convolutions was an enclosed black wooden sphere about nine inches in diameter through which passed a portion of the spiralled piping. The mouthpiece tapered from a long flexible swan's neck cylinder. It was a graceful thing but suddenly I had an eerie feeling the instrument vibrated with a strange animation of its own.

Gualco took the instrument, fingered certain valves, started blowing gently into the mouthpiece. I waited a moment, puzzled.

"I don't hear anything," I murmured.

"Listen!"

I stood listening to uncertain silence. Then suddenly a familiar feeling began to crawl through my veins. I felt an exhilaration, a triumphant excitement. My pulse pounded joyously; I breathed deeper; a wild elation seized me and leapt toward an almost unbearable crescendo of exultation. Then gradually, as though I were being lowered gently to earth once more, the feeling tapered off and Gualco laid the instrument down.

"My God!" I gasped. "What have you got there?"

"Play him another," Evelyn said laughing at my bewilderment.

"What shall I play?" Gualco laughed. "What else *can* I play, feeling the way I do?"

"Try this one!"

To my amazement she reached out and slapped Gualco sharply on both cheeks.

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"You fool!" she cried, slapping him twice more. "Play *that!* Quickly!"

Once more Gualco blew into the instrument. Once more I heard nothing. But something was happening inside me. This time it was a different feeling; a dull anger filtering like acid through my system. I clenched my fists. Hot blood seeped to my face and neck. My muscles quivered with unexplainable rage.

"Stop it! Stop that stupid blowing!" I reached out to tear the thing from his lips.

Gualco set it down, very angry. Evelyn was angry too. Presently she reached over and kissed him.

"You know I didn't mean it," she said.

"It communicates emotion," Gualco said after a moment when our tempers had cooled. "Pure, unalloyed emotion."

"Emotion?" I was very confused. "What kind?"

"Any kind. Whatever emotion the performer feels at the moment. He transmits it unchanged to the listener."

"Can anyone play it?"

"Any one who feels."

"But . . . but it's impossible! There's some kind of trick to this." I looked suspiciously at them. "In the first place, I heard absolutely nothing. Nothing!"

"But you felt something."

I could not deny it.

"When sound waves vibrate at the rate of between 16 and 30,000 vibrations per second, they are audible."

"I know all that!" I interrupted.

"This instrument produces vibrations outside that range. Just because you can't hear them doesn't mean you aren't affected by them."

I could only look at him blankly.

"It's the first step in breaking down the isolation I was talking about," Gualco continued. "Soon people may literally talk with their emotions. Telempathy — if I may coin a word."

Gently he stroked the smooth wooden sphere as though caressing the flanks of a restless pet black panther.

"It's easy to transmit ideas," he went on. "Ideas being cold mechanical things can be transmitted with cold mechanical words. But emotion! To make a person understand how you really feel is a hopeless task."

"But music transmits emotion," I said.

"All art does," Gualco said. "Music. Painting. Literature. But imperfectly. I didn't invent the process — just improved it."

Later that afternoon I got drunk. And after sobering up with a long

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swim in the surf, I got drunk again. I wanted to forget about that looping instrument with the bell at one end and the swan's neck at the other. But nothing helped — images of the coiled monstrosity churned through my head — it was something I didn't want to believe in but had to.

Next morning I pulled myself together and spent the day testing the Gualcophone — as Evelyn insisted we name it. One by one we called the men into Gualco's room and without explanation tried it on them. Our entire emotional repertoire was played: fear, affection, melancholy, hatred, hope, jubilation, amusement and a few we couldn't put a name to. We had old Charlie sobbing with an unreasoning happiness. Sour-faced Nick, the ill-tempered janitor, called everybody brother. Jock Lippitt laughed at anything you said. Yes, it worked all right. No doubt about it.

For three days after that a strange indecision hovered over us all. What were we going to do with it now that we had it? And what exactly *was* it? A musical instrument? An apparatus to be used by doctors for diagnosing emotional disturbances? A machine to be presented to the University physics laboratory for use in pure research?

Gualco wasn't much help — the strain of long months of unceasing labor had left him empty and exhausted to the point of collapse.

"I'll leave it up to you, Mr. Heinkle," he sighed. "But however you go about it, I request only that it be placed in the hands of an artist, and that it be employed only that humans can learn to come closer to one another."

For two more days I wrestled with the problem of the Gualcophone's public debut. I couldn't bear to think of this strange and powerful instrument being dissected and analyzed in a physics laboratory. Nor was I satisfied to have the world learn of it through some dull monograph written in an obscure medical journal by a psychiatrist who'd had success in diagnosing melancholia by having a patient blow his hallucinations about a sterile room.

I wanted to break the news in some dazzling, dramatic manner. I wanted a vast hall, a vast crowd — music lovers, medical men, scientists, teachers, just plain people — then present the Gualcophone to them with its glorious promise of understanding and rapport among men, the reality of truly talking with the emotions.

And yet how was I going to *fill* a hall? Certainly not by announcing a concert played on a new instrument. No matter how extravagant the claims, no matter how forceful the publicity campaign, the only ones to show up would be the crackpots, screwballs, drunks, and lonely little old ladies. Then suddenly I had the answer — Leon Mazzano.

You know him, of course — maybe you've even heard him play. Few

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violinists today can equal his technique. Those fingers! Absolutely incredible to watch them. They can do *anything* on the strings, absolutely anything.

I had known Mazzano off and on for ten years; he was a distant relation of my wife's and we had been thrown together at various times through our common interest in music. Yet he was the kind you never really get to know — charming, tall, smooth; but there was something soft and lacking in him, as though he had no bones. And in spite of his phenomenal technique, he'd been a relatively obscure performer for years.

Then Gualco made him one of his specially constructed violins. From the day Mazzano first used it, his star began to rise. There was something of pure magic about that combination — Mazzano's technical facility and Gualco's instrument — and the time required for him to reach the peak, to become the top virtuoso of the concert stage was fantastically short.

I heard him do a Mozart concerto once, can still see the pleasant, innocuous looking figure on the stage, smiling meaninglessly out at the audience, can still hear the golden, dancing notes of Mozart as they leapt and danced throughout the Opera House with almost a life of their own. The audience went wild and so did I — it was a tremendous performance, and yet when I went around afterwards to congratulate him, the vacant smile was still there and he was as fresh and unruffled as though he had just risen.

Yes, Mazzano was my man — Tuesday night he was giving a concert at the Opera House, might even be in town right now. . . .

Mazzano greeted me in his room at the Granada with his usual measured cordiality and after a few minutes' small talk I launched into the whole story.

Then I took a deep breath. "I'd like you to introduce it, Leon," I said. "Tuesday night. At your concert." I braced myself for the flood of objections and excuses.

No objections came. Instead, he just sat there with a faint smile, surrounded with that strange cloud of cool charm, massaging incredibly flexible fingers, and nodding agreement.

"Certainly, Jake," he said. "Just let me know what I'm to do. I owe you and Gualco a great deal." He glanced over to the black violin case on the luggage rack.

I walked home later jubilant yet puzzled. It was almost too easy. Somehow I would have felt more comfortable if he'd expressed *some* doubt, voiced some objection — but he hadn't even asked to see the instrument. Mazzano had cause to feel grateful, of course — it had been the violin that had made the man — but still . . .

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From backstage through a small crevice in the backdrop I peered out at the swarms of people who even now — ten minutes before curtain time — were jamming the Opera House. A queasy feeling twitched at my stomach as I stared out at that writhing sea of people and their invisible eyes. The balconies and galleries swept upward to the very roof, poised like a giant wave at its crest. I'd never looked at a crowd from this vantage point before — even knowing they couldn't see me I was seized with a sudden dizzy twinge of stage fright. My God, what if *I* had to go out there!

I rejoined Evelyn and Gualco who were in a small soundproof compartment just off the wings. Mazzano was still in his dressing room.

"Wire recorder working O.K.?" I asked Evelyn nervously.

"Everything's ready."

We had planned the whole thing very carefully. Mazzano was to play the first half of his concert as scheduled, but instead of the inevitable encore number before intermission he would at that time introduce the Gualcophone.

The problem of just which emotions the virtuoso was to play on the Gualcophone and how they were to be first stimulated in himself had also been worked out. It was Gualco's suggestion that the whole first half of Mazzano's violin concert be recorded. When the time came for Mazzano to play the Gualcophone, the recording would be played back to him very softly. As soon as he had projected himself into the mood of the selection, he would begin blowing the Gualcophone, attempting to re-evoke the emotions he had experienced while he played that particular selection previously on the violin. Thus the Gualcophone part of the recital would be a kind of emotional recapitulation of the whole first part of the program.

Mazzano — the violinist — was in magnificent form that night. We listened to him from the wings — a nervous little group huddled around the wire recorder directly in front of the glass-plated booth out of which Gualco peered with tense, darting eyes. We listened as the virtuoso drew gasps from the audience with his dazzling rendition of Paganini's *Moto Perpetuo*. We listened, bewitched, as Mazzano wove his poignant, melancholy web around us with a haunting movement from Wieniawski's Concerto in D minor. And finally when the first half of the program drew to a close, we listened to the wild, tumultuous acclamation of the audience.

A weird hush muffled the auditorium as Mazzano appeared for what must have been his tenth curtain call, held up his hand for silence, and adjusted the Gualcophone under his left arm.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Mazzano began. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the wonderful reception you have given me this evening. But now I have something very unusual . . ."

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I doubt very much if anyone in the audience understood what Mazzano was saying, nor was it especially intended to be understood — the Gualcophone would very soon explain itself.

"Everything ready?" I whispered to Evelyn who was preparing the wire recorder for the play-back.

"Ready!" she cried as the glittering notes of the Paganini *Moto Perpetuo* sparkled forth, just loud enough for Mazzano to hear on the other side of the curtain. Through a narrow slit in the curtain I watched Mazzano close his eyes, listening to his own notes, projecting himself into the mood of the piece. Then slowly, thoughtfully, he placed the Gualcophone mouthpiece to his lips and began blowing.

I looked out at the crowd. People leaned forward in their seats — interested, curious, respectfully attentive. Mazzano blew. . . . And blew. . . .

And nothing happened.

The people just sat there, rustled programs, scraped feet, coughed, waited for something to happen. And the longer Mazzano blew the more restless and bored they grew, and finally after a lifetime, Mazzano lowered the Gualcophone, bowed, and stalked offstage.

"What happened!" I cried.

"What do you mean?" Mazzano asked coolly. Outside a puzzled audience stirred uneasily, not knowing what was expected of it. A few drifted toward exits.

"You were supposed to feel the same emotions you felt while you played *Moto Perpetuo*."

"But I did!" Mazzano protested. "Exactly the same!"

I stared at the man blankly — there was no doubting his sincerity. What had gone wrong?

"Try the Wieniawski," I whispered hoarsely, pushing him toward the wings again. "*And don't blow until you feel exactly the same way you felt when you played it on the violin!*" I motioned Evelyn to start the recorder.

This time it was even worse. The audience was certainly not being kindled into anything except restlessness and boredom. I felt a strange lassitude myself.

Through the glass in Gualco's booth, I saw him motioning to me.

"It's no good," he said, shaking his head.

"What the hell is *wrong?*"

"He could stand out there blowing all night and nothing would happen. The man *has* no emotion."

Blankly I stared at Gualco and in that moment the whole thing was suddenly clear: Mazzano's meaningless smile, the soft affability, the stagnant calm which I had mistaken for profundity. Mazzano could evoke any emo-

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tion at all through his superb technique on Gualco's custom-built violin . . . but he himself had no real emotion at all except the one he was now blowing out over the auditorium — boredom and self-love. No wonder he'd never graduated from the third-rate concert league until he'd obtained Gualco's instrument! No wonder he was so grateful!

"I'm going out there myself," Gualco said, moving toward the wings.

Evelyn seized his arm.

"You can't, Arthur! The applause would kill you!"

Gualco hesitated. Evelyn turned to me.

"Father, don't let him!" The look in her eyes meant only one thing. I took a deep breath.

"Play the Mozart," I called to Evelyn as I started for the stage.

I was all right as I walked across those bare boards toward Mazzano. I was all right as I took the instrument from him, nodded him off stage.

Then I turned and faced the crowd.

It is a simple matter, of course, to look back at it now and realize I was simply overwhelmed with sudden and absolute stagefright. At that moment, however, the shock of looking out at those thousands and thousands of restless forms was so paralyzing that I could only stand there frozen with a nameless terror.

The people! There were thousands! Millions! Everybody in the whole world! There were so many people that suddenly they ceased to be people at all, became ripples in a whirling ocean. I was hemmed in. I was deep within the vortex of a gigantic maelstrom. Its dizzy currents threatened to engulf me completely.

God knows how long I stood there, stupefied by the gangling monster in front of me — unable to move, unable to think, unable to focus my eyes on anything or any person, conscious of nothing but terror and blinding footlights and murky faces and violent trembling.

Then dully, I remembered. Like a sleepwalker I lifted the Gualcophone to my lips and blew — blew my terror out over the throng.

A change in mood filtered through the hall like a chill breeze. First there was an uneasy hush, then an anxious rippling murmur. It grew louder, more apprehensive. A woman shrieked in sudden terror. As though set off by chain reaction hers was echoed by other shrieks.

With senseless concentration I continued blowing.

And the crowd's fear grew — a blind, animal fear — galloping through the fuddled mob like a stampede, and as a body they rose, shivering with panic, and — even as I — too numb to flee.

Suddenly I felt my fear beginning to ebb. And in its place flowed that most potent antidote of fear — anger.

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Who were these stupid dolts making such a fool of me! To hell with them! The faces began to come into focus. A red-faced woman in the second row standing there twisting her purse! A skinny guy with a sagging jaw, fingering his black tie! Was I afraid of *them?* To hell with them!

I grew angrier and angrier, blowing it out across the crowd. All thought of Mozart, of Gualco, of everything was gone save the fact that this bunch of nobodies out there was making a fool of me.

Out in front some one rose and shouted:

"Get off the stage, you clown!"

A sullen murmur rumbled down from the first balcony like distant thunder. Bellowing up from left center came an angry chorus of boos. From all parts of the auditorium stray, hostile sounds exploded — catcalls, curses, indignant shouts — growing ever louder, more insistent, all gradually welding into an angry crescendo of howling, clamoring voices.

To hell with them! To hell with them! To hell with them! I'd show them I wasn't afraid!

Harder and harder I blew, nursing my wrath against the return of that intolerable fear, fanning it deliberately, allowing it to leap into an uncontrollable fury, until the poisons of contempt and malice and hatred leapt through my body in great jagged spurts.

As from one throat a thunderous roar of rage filled the auditorium. Maddened by fear and hate, the crowd spilled into the aisles, inching forward toward me like an evil tide. Brutal faces, distorted with hate and anger, shrieked curses up at me. On the far side a woman fainted and a knot of writhing bodies shoved her aside and jammed forward. Somewhere came the crash of shattered glass and a sickening splintering of wood. In the balcony someone set fire to the drapes; terrified screams of those near the crackling flames pierced the air, agonized and wailing. A hurled iron brace, wrenched from one of the seats, clattered on the stage, ricocheted, crashed into the footlights.

"Kill him! Kill him!"

The rhythmic thunder of a thousand stomping feet echoed the chant.

I should have quit, of course. But mad dogs locked in mortal combat do not walk away from one another. And I was locked in mortal combat with that howling, stamping mob. I *couldn't* stop blowing. I *couldn't* put the instrument down. It was part of me, growing out of my mouth like a monstrous tumor, and with great sobbing gasps I poured myself into the mouthpiece as though bodily trying to crawl through the narrow tubing to get at my enemy. Even as a shower of wadded programs, opera glasses and metal compacts thudded onto the stage. Even as the mob surged screaming into the orchestra pit.

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Through the clamor I became conscious of Evelyn at my side attempting to wrest the instrument from me. She shouted something in my face. The din was so great I could only see her lips move, and I jerked away from her, then watched her slump to the floor as a hurled opera glass glanced off her temple.

I paused in the blowing only a moment, staring at Evelyn, my rage growing into a murderous, insane blood-lust. I edged toward the lynch mob, braced myself against that hurricane of noise, and raised the Gualcophone to my lips once more. This time . . .

And then, suddenly, into the middle of that pandemonium, into that deafening blast of 10,000 screaming devils, another figure appeared from the wings — Gualco.

Even through the uproar, even through my own sick fury, I was conscious of the torture of the man as he made his way across that stage stabbed by the thousand spears of sound which bombarded him from below. White-faced and trancelike, he approached me as though picking his way barefoot across a bed of hot coals in some desperate trial by fire. When he reached me, he lunged for the instrument, pulled it from my lips by sheer weight, then with it, collapsed to the floor writhing in agony.

With the instrument silenced, the crowd eased back, its fever broken. Blinking I stood there numbly, like someone aroused from a hideous nightmare.

I looked down at the two forms at my feet. Evelyn was stirring and seemed all right, but Gualco just lay there, his hands clutching his solar plexus, groaning and drenched in sweat.

"Get him backstage," I shouted to Evelyn, who had arisen and was hovering over Gualco. "Quickly!"

The din had receded but still there was enough noise to tear him apart.

"There isn't time!" Evelyn cried. "The glass in the booth is shattered. And this noise . . ."

Suddenly she reached down and kissed Gualco so very, very tenderly. Then she picked up the Gualcophone lying beside him, arose slowly, put the instrument to her lips, and, never taking her eyes from Gualco, started blowing.

A vast sigh — a sigh of pain alleviated — drifted up from the crowd watching the girl blow her love and tenderness throughout the hall as she stared down at the stricken figure of Gualco. And a silence that was more than a silence settled over them all — a peace and humility and understanding — and even I, standing there still shaking slightly, verged on the answers to all things:

Once again I knew what it was to speak and hear and understand —

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not with words — but with the voice of emotion and spirit, a language some already knew and others couldn't learn in a thousand years, a language as gentle as breathing or as overwhelming as a hurricane. I seemed to hear the mysterious notes and endless harmonies which flowed through the world waiting to be heard. I felt the dark inner walls of isolation melt away and the winds of the universe blow through me. And I heard all the other unhearable things: prayers of the wretched and the unspoken language of lovers. And when finally Evelyn lowered the instrument, there was dead silence in the auditorium and the people filed out as reverently as though leaving church.

Well, that's the Gualcophone story. The papers wrote the whole thing off the next day by stating simply that Mazzano's brilliant performance was interrupted during intermission time by a fire of unknown origin resulting in near panic which was brought under control by an unknown girl who played "The Star Spangled Banner" from the stage on a French horn.

Gualco was in bad shape for a while. The noise poisoning almost finished him, but three months isolation fixed him up and he's all right now. He and Evelyn were quietly married soon after his convalescence and are leading a happy, peaceful life in a remote mountain retreat where he has his own small work shop. He's sticking pretty close to violins these days.

And the Gualcophone itself? Arthur left it to me to dispose of, but what in God's name am *I* going to do with it? Everytime I touch the thing I start to tremble. Strange that the instrument which could have meant so much to a different world is actually too dangerous to have lying around. We're just not ready for it. If the earth were filled with Gualcos or Evelyns it might be different.

Yes, it's still here in the shop. You'll never hear it though — never even see it. No one will. I've got it locked up in an old safe in the basement. Going to stay there too — stay there until the world finally catches up with it.

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The versatility of E. B. White's literary talent is apparently yet to be limited. As an editorial writer for both "Harper's" and "The New Yorker" he has long reported to us — with appropriate comment — that mixture of foolishness and wisdom which seems to be the American way of living. But a cursory check-up shows that he also excels as a poet, an essayist, a parodist and a novelist. Now, happily, he has turned his skilled hand to science fiction. The qualities apparent in everything he writes are, we believe, a sharp but kindly wit and a generous understanding of human frailty. These particularly distinguish this amiable account of the bartender who didn't like robots.

The Hour of Letdown

by E. B. WHITE

When the man came in, carrying the machine, most of us looked up from our drinks, because we had never seen anything like it before. The man set the thing down on top of the bar near the beerpulls. It took up an ungodly amount of room and you could see the bartender didn't like it any too well, having this big, ugly-looking gadget parked right there.

"Two rye-and-water," the man said.

The bartender went on puddling an Old-Fashioned that he was working on, but he was obviously turning over the request in his mind.

"You want a double?" he asked, after a bit.

"No," said the man. "Two rye-and-water, please." He stared straight at the bartender, not exactly unfriendly but on the other hand not affirmatively friendly.

Many years of catering to the kind of people that come into saloons had provided the bartender with an adjustable mind. Nevertheless, he did not adjust readily to this fellow, and he did not like the machine — that was sure. He picked up a live cigarette that was idling on the edge of the cash register, took a drag out of it, and returned it thoughtfully. Then he poured two shots of rye whiskey, drew two glasses of water, and shoved the drinks in front of the man. People were watching. When something a little out of the ordinary takes place at a bar, the sense of it spreads quickly all along the line and pulls the customers together.

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The man gave no sign of being the center of attention. He laid a $5 bill down on the bar. Then he drank one of the ryes and chased it with water. He picked up the other rye, opened a small vent in the machine (it was like an oil cup) and poured the whiskey in, and then poured the water in.

The bartender watched grimly. "Not funny," he said in an even voice. "And furthermore, your companion takes up too much room. Why'n you put it over on that bench by the door, make more room here."

"There's plenty of room for everyone here," replied the man.

"I ain't amused," said the bartender. "Put the goddam thing over near the door like I say. Nobody will touch it."

The man smiled. "You should have seen it this afternoon," he said. "It was magnificent. Today was the third day of the tournament. Imagine it — three days of continuous brainwork! And against the top players in the country, too. Early in the game it gained an advantage; then for two hours it exploited the advantage brilliantly, ending with the opponent's king backed in a corner. The sudden capture of a knight, the neutralization of a bishop, and it was all over. You know how much money it won, all told, in three days of playing chess?"

"How much?" asked the bartender.

"Five thousand dollars," said the man. "Now it wants to let down, wants to get a little drunk."

The bartender ran his towel vaguely over some wet spots. "Take it somewheres else and get it drunk there!" he said firmly. "I got enough troubles."

The man shook his head and smiled. "No, we like it here." He pointed at the empty glasses. "Do this again, will you, please?"

The bartender slowly shook his head. He seemed dazed but dogged. "You stow the thing away," he ordered. "I'm not ladling out whiskey for jokestersmiths."

" 'Jokesmiths,' " said the machine. "The word is 'jokesmiths.' "

A few feet down the bar, a customer who was on his third highball seemed ready to participate in this conversation to which we had all been listening so attentively. He was a middle-aged man. His necktie was pulled down away from his collar, and he had eased the collar by unbuttoning it. He had pretty nearly finished his third drink, and the alcohol tended to make him throw his support in with the underprivileged and the thirsty.

"If the machine wants another drink, give it another drink," he said to the bartender. "Let's not have haggling."

The fellow with the machine turned to his new-found friend and gravely raised his hand to his temple, giving him a salute of gratitude and fellowship. He addressed his next remark to him, as though deliberately snubbing the bartender.

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"You know how it is when you're all fagged out mentally, how you want a drink?"

"Certainly do," replied the friend. "Most natural thing in the world."

There was a stir all along the bar, some seeming to side with the bartender, others with the machine group. A tall, gloomy man standing next to me spoke up.

"Another whiskey sour, Bill," he said. "And go easy on the lemon juice."

"Picric acid," said the machine, sullenly. "They don't use lemon juice in these places."

"That does it!" said the bartender, smacking his hand on the bar. "Will you put that thing away or else beat it out of here. I ain't in the mood, I tell you. I got this saloon to run and I don't want lip from a mechanical brain or whatever the hell you've got there."

The man ignored this ultimatum. He addressed his friend, whose glass was now empty.

"It's not just that it's all tuckered out after three days of chess," he said amiably. "You know another reason it wants a drink?"

"No," said the friend. "Why?"

"It cheated," said the man.

At this remark, the machine chuckled. One of its arms dipped slightly, and a light glowed in a dial.

The friend frowned. He looked as though his dignity had been hurt, as though his trust had been misplaced. "Nobody can cheat at chess," he said. "Simpossible. In chess, everything is open and above the board. The nature of the game of chess is such that cheating is impossible."

"That's what I used to think, too," said the man. "But there *is* a way."

"Well, it doesn't surprise me any," put in the bartender. "The first time I laid my eyes on that crummy thing I spotted it for a crook."

"Two rye-and-water," said the man.

"You can't have the whiskey," said the bartender. He glared at the mechanical brain. "How do I know it ain't drunk already?"

"That's simple. Ask it something," said the man.

The customers shifted and stared into the mirror. We were all in this thing now, up to our necks. We waited. It was the bartender's move.

"Ask it what? Such as?" said the bartender.

"Makes no difference. Pick a couple big figures, ask it to multiply them together. You couldn't multiply big figures together if you were drunk, could you?"

The machine shook slightly, as though making internal preparations.

"Ten thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, multiply it by 99," said the bartender, viciously.

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We could tell that he was throwing in the two nines to make it hard.

The machine flickered. One of its tubes spat, and a hand changed position, jerkily.

"One million seventy-five thousand three hundred and thirty-eight," said the machine.

Not a glass was raised all along the bar. People just stared gloomily into the mirror; some of us studied our own faces, others took carom shots at the man and the machine.

Finally, a youngish, mathematically minded customer got out a piece of paper and a pencil and went into retirement. "It works out," he reported, after some minutes of calculating. "You can't say the machine is drunk!"

Everyone now glared at the bartender. Reluctantly he poured two shots of rye, drew two glasses of water. The man drank his drink. Then he fed the machine its drink. The machine's light grew fainter. One of its cranky little arms wilted.

For a while the saloon simmered along like a ship at sea in calm weather. Every one of us seemed to be trying to digest the situation, with the help of liquor. Quite a few glasses were refilled. Most of us sought help in the mirror — the court of last appeal.

The fellow with the unbuttoned collar settled his score. He walked stiffly over and stood between the man and the machine. He put one arm around the man, the other arm around the machine. "Let's get out of here and go to a good place," he said.

The machine glowed slightly. It seemed to be a little drunk now.

"All right," said the man. "That suits me fine. I've got my car outside."

He settled for the drinks and put down a tip. Quietly and a trifle uncertainly he tucked the machine under his arm, and he and his companion of the night walked to the door and out into the street.

The bartender stared fixedly, then resumed his light housekeeping. "So he's got his car outside," he said, with heavy sarcasm. "Now isn't that nice!"

A customer at the end of the bar near the door left his drink, stepped to the window, parted the curtains, and looked out. He watched for a moment, then returned to his place and addressed the bartender. "It's even nicer than you think," he said. "It's a Cadillac. And which one of the three of them d'ya think is doing the driving?"

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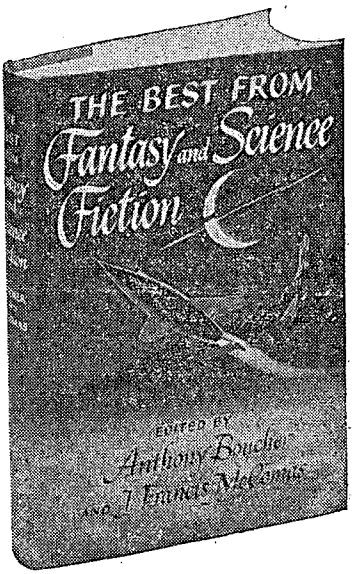

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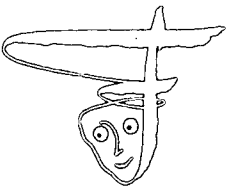

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